JEREMY AT CRALE

HUGH WALPOLE

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JEREMY AT CRALE

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JEREMY AT CRALE

HIS FRIENDS, HIS AMBITIONS
AND HIS ONE GREAT ENEMY

By
HUGH WALPOLE

CASSELL AND COMPANY LTD
London, Toronto, Melbourne and Sydney

First published in 1927

Printed in Great Britain

To my Brother
ROBIN
Affectionately

Tom . . . was a robust and combative urchin.

Tom Brown's Schooldays.

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JEREMY AT CRALE

CHAPTER I

THE FORTRESS

I

YOUNG Cole, quivering with pride, surveyed the room.

So, at last, was one of his deepest ambitions realized.

It was not, when you looked at it, a very large room. If, as was the way with many of the other Studies, it had had a table in the middle if it, there would have been precious little space in which to move. But he and Gauntlet Ma. almost at once after their arrival last night, had come to an agreement about this. They would have their own tables in their own corners, leaving the middle of the room free—and Marlowe could lump it.

Ma Bender had found two small (and exceedingly dirty) tables, and the only thing that remained was to toss for the window. They had tossed and Cole had won. Marlowe, of course, had the dark corner near the door.

Young Jeremy Cole didn't dare to think what his

feelings would have been had he lost that toss. He wanted that window terribly—nobody in the world would ever know how badly—and for once in a way he had been successful. "For once in a way," because he always lost the toss at everything.

He was alone in the room at last (he had hurried here directly after Third School) and his intention was to arrange his table before anyone came in. He saw that Gauntlet had already arranged *his*, that from somewhere or another he had procured a dark blue cloth and a smart-looking writing-case.

Then, turning with a shock of surprise, he discovered that that young pip-squeak Marlowe had arranged *his*—and what an arrangement! There, in between the door and the farther corner, exactly fitting into its space, was one of those old writing bureaux, Eighteenth Century or something, with little drawers and twisted brass handles and of a dark, shiny colour that even Jeremy, who knew nothing whatever about furniture, recognized as handsome. Moreover, above this remarkable piece of furniture was a small, dark bookcase with a glass front, and inside this were books with shining and gleaming faces.

On the top of the bureau was a leather frame that contained the portrait of a thin, severe, military-looking gentleman; there was also a strange, brass figure of a squatting, malevolent-looking image—Chinese or Hindu, something Eastern.

All that Jeremy could say was "Gosh!"

When had young Marlowe produced these things? They weren't there last night. What side! If young Marlowe thought that this kind of swank . . .

But he turned, then, back to his own scratched and naked-seeming table. Large splashes of ink disfigured its surface. The few things that he had to arrange upon it—a dingy double frame containing his father and mother, a very faded green blotter, one of the school ink-wells and a photograph of the House Second XV. of last season—how miserable these seemed!

He was aware of acute and poignant disappointment. And to think that he should be disappointed so soon when, during the whole of the preceding year, he had longed and longed for just this moment—when by simple right of brains, industry and personality he should be part owner of one of these Studies! And here he was and it was dust-and-ashes in the mouth!

However, being Jeremy Cole, he very quickly recovered. What, after all, did it matter? It was all very well to make a show on the second day of the term, but what about the end of the first week? Everyone knew that you couldn't, unless you were in the Sixth, or a Games Captain, and had fags and a whole Study to yourself, keep anything decent for more than a day or two. What would Marlowe's old bureau look like after one or two rags? But were there to be any rags in here? He and Gauntlet had only last night sworn that there should not. They would keep the place decent and rag elsewhere. . . . Would they? He couldn't be sure. He wasn't even certain of himself. The very thought of young Marlowe's "side" made him want to kick that bureau about.

However, there was always the window. Jeremy

turned to it and sighed with contentment. To the ordinary observer it might not have seemed a marvellous view. On the right was the great, towering wall of Upper School and, lower down, jutting out of this, the Upper Fives Courts. In the middle distance was a square, rather dingy space known as Coulter's Yard, and beyond Coulter's the path that bordered the Upper Playing Fields. On the left were the walls, red-bricked and creeper-covered, of Jeremy's own House, Leeson's.

It is true that beyond the "Upper Games" (these were scarcely visible because they shelved so swiftly down-hill) were the tops of trees, and beyond the trees again you could imagine the sea, knowing as you did that it was inevitably and eternally there.

But, on the whole, not much for the ordinary observer. Everything, however, for Jeremy.

By opening the window and craning his neck he could have a very good view of the Fives Court and, without craning at all, the whole gossip and turmoil of Coulter's was visible to him. Beyond all, most of the real life of the school—masters, visitors and every species of boy—passed at one time or another along the Gridiron, the path beyond Coulter's.

A marvellous and all-engrossing view. It was wonderful, when you came to consider it, that Gauntlet had submitted so tamely to the result of that significant toss.

But his table? Could he not do something about it? He would write home at once and demand that a table-cloth should be sent. And then what

about Uncle Samuel's funny picture that had lain for three years, the period of Jeremy's sojourn at Crale, at the bottom of his play-box! Every holiday it had gone home with him and, as he had always insisted on himself packing and unpacking that sacred vessel, no one had ever discovered it.

To tell the truth he had been always ashamed of that picture. Who wouldn't be? It might be *anything*. Uncle Samuel said it was "Sheep in a Field," but whoever saw sheep like little red dots and lacking apparently both heads and tails?

Jeremy had too high an opinion of Uncle Samuel to leave it at home. Someone would discover it and then Uncle Samuel would be hurt, but no one in the school had ever seen it, and until now Jeremy had resolved that no one ever should.

However, it had a rather nice thin, gilt frame. People might appreciate *that*, and who was there in Jeremy's set who knew anything about pictures, anyway?

He turned once more to the window. It was a lovely, early autumn day. Soft, white clouds hovered lazily about a sky shining with sun. The tips of the trees against the horizon shaded in shadowy orange over a blue so faint that it was scarcely any colour at all.

But Jeremy didn't bother about the day. Someone was coming into the nearest Fives Court. It might be Bates, and wasn't that "Bunch" Halleran?

He was half out of the window, his legs hanging over the table. The door behind him opened, and turning impetuously, his career was nearly then and there terminated for ever.

Oh, all right; it was Gauntlet. The excitement of what he had to say carried him tumbling from the table to the floor, and the impetus of his movement almost carried him into Gauntlet's arms.

"I say, Spikes. . . . Look here! Look at young Marlowe!"

Gauntlet turned round, and he said what Jeremy had said:

"Gosh!" Then he added, staring: "It's rather ripping!"

"Spikes" Gauntlet was a little taller than Jeremy and a great deal more handsome. He was, in fact, a good-looking small boy, and, for his tender years, something of a dandy. There are certain small boys who, through all the rough and tumble of their Jungle life, are never dishevelled or untidy. Their shining Eton collars are always clean, their cheeks are never inky, even their nails are grey rather than black—that is, if there *are* any nails. The knees of their trousers are never dusty, nor the seat thereof, and their boots never yawn, nor do their socks tumble in cascades below the ankle.

Such a boy was Gauntlet, and yet it would not be fair to say that he held himself apart. He was, on the whole, popular in spite of his neatness, although not so popular as his hard work in the direction of popularity entitled him to be.

For it was the desire and longing of his heart soul and stomach to be popular. This was his only goal in life. He knew (and with surprising clarity for so young a boy) that as a scholar he would never be especially distinguished, nor would he ever play games supremely well. He was not rich, nor had

his father a title (than small boys there exist in all the world no greater social snobs) ; but he had, he fancied, " charm." He was at heart extremely conceited, but he was already worldly-wise enough to know that to display your conceit before the world was the height of social folly. He was, in fact, very old for his years, being an only child and possessing an adoring mother.

He was an intriguer born. He owed allegiance to no one : others thought they were his friends and he liked them to think so ; but, on his side, he gave his friendship to no one. He did not, indeed, know what the word meant. He cultivated the suppression of the emotions. He showed neither anger nor fear, neither greed nor cruelty. He was naturally something of a puzzle to the young wild animals in whose midst he lived.

This moving upward into the Study world had been an event of far greater excitement to him than to young Cole, but he had shown no excitement whatever.

He had feared, at the end of the summer term, that he would not obtain his promotion out of the Middle Fourth into the Upper Fourth. The Upper Fourth meant the Upper School. Every boy in Upper School had the share of a Study. He had, however, snatched his remove by the skin of his teeth, if so melodramatic a metaphor may be used in connection with so controlled a personality.

When, at the end of the first week of the summer holidays, his father, a dyspeptic General, had received a letter informing him that his son had won his remove, young Gauntlet occupied many

summer hours in wondering with whom his Study lot would be cast.

Only six Leeson boys could possibly have their remove—Staire, Cole, Marlowe, Perrin, Hackett and himself. Three of them would share a Study; the other three would be distributed among other Studies. The permutations and combinations were infinite.

Of these five boys two were superior—young Cole because of his football, and "Red" Staire because of—oh, because of a thousand things.

The rise to a Study was a rise out of the lower ranges of the Jungle—it was a half-way stage between serfdom and liberty. Now was the time when you could look around and judge who, chances being equal, would in two years' time be Leaders of the House and possibly Leaders of the School. Of course, not always. There were some stupid boys who would linger in the Lower School for years and yet, because of their sporting talents, would be "Bloods" and Leaders of Men —Halleran, for instance, who was still in the Upper Fourth although he had been Fives Captain for the last two years.

But when, as was the case with Stocky Cole and Red Staire, there were brains as well as games, you could foretell the future pretty accurately.

Well and good—no problem at all, had Stocky Cole and Red Staire been friends. But, as everyone in Lower School knew, they were, and had been for the past two years, the most determined enemies. They loathed one another. All the Lower School politics in Leeson's during the

last year had hovered and hesitated around their feud. You could not possibly belong to both camps.

It looked, then, as though Fate had definitely decided that Gauntlet should henceforth belong to the Cole party. This decision about the Study had surely decided the matter. But not at all. Young Gauntlet was not to be rushed like that. Like Mr. Asquith, whose character he in no other way resembled, he would " wait and see." (These were days before that famous phrase had been created.)

Were his feelings to be consulted (and they never were, if he could avoid it), he liked Cole the better of the two. You couldn't help liking Stocky Cole. Almost everyone did except Staire. But was Cole likely to rise to the top ? He was, from Gauntlet's point of view, in character extremely rum. He seemed to have no ambitions—with the one grand exception, of course—football. And even in football he didn't " work for position," as Gauntlet would have done. He never made up to anybody. Why, all last year he was Considine's fag, and into Considine's Study all the football men at one time or another penetrated. But young Cole had never sweated himself for any one of them more than for another. It was generally reported that Considine himself would have done a lot for Stocky had Stocky allowed him, but Stocky seemed to prefer his own inconsiderable friends, people of no account like Jumbo Payne. There was a case in point. Exactly. Who was Jumbo Payne ? Nobody and Nothing. Moreover, would he ever be Anything or Anybody ?

Never. No good at games; no good at work. Nothing to say for himself, nothing to look at, no family, no money. Gauntlet simply couldn't understand making a friend of such a Nothing. Young Cole never seemed to look ahead—save only in football. He *had* been a trifle excited over the window question. But a window? What was a window? Gauntlet cared nothing for windows.

Now Red Staire was quite different. He made friends of the mighty. He was on good terms with almost everyone in authority. His father was a baronet of most ancient standing, and he had plenty of money. He might very possibly next summer get his First Cricket. He was at any rate certain of his House Cricket.

Yes, but next summer? That was a long way off and Staire was no good at football. This was Stocky Cole's term. Anything might happen before next summer.

2

The two boys made a striking contrast as they stood together staring at Marlowe's bureau.

Although they were almost of the same age—fifteen and three-quarters—Gauntlet seemed considerably the elder. His face was old for a boy, and this was in part because his skin was so smooth and fair that it was almost a mask.

He had great distinction, his nose and mouth and chin finely chiselled. His only disadvantage was that his eyes were of too pale a blue and his fair eyebrows too faint. His body was slim and

neat, his hands and feet small and delicately made, and he carried himself with a fine balance, something almost arrogant but not quite.

Jeremy, on the other hand, was far too short for beauty and as broad as he was long. He was the *thickest* boy—thick everywhere, in shoulders and thigh and leg. His face was round and always in colour a brown-red like a well-nurtured pippin. His hair, which was dark, was innocent of parting and would stick up in a tuft at the back, do what he would to plaster it down. His mouth was large, and when he grinned (which was frequently), his whole face rumpled with amusement. He had a way of spreading his legs and swinging his short arms as though he were going to leap into space. His voice was rather thick and husky, deep for his age. His hands, which were large and strong, seemed for ever to be wanting to be doing something. But he was not restless. He often stood or sat for a long time without moving, his brow wrinkled as though he were thinking deeply. More often than not he was not thinking at all. But when he did think he was lost, and it often took him a long time to find himself again.

He suffered from spates of excitement, and when these were upon him he had to work them off at once; any difficulties with authority that had occurred during his three years at Crale had arisen from this.

He was of a most equable temper and was both too lazy and too amiable not to be on good terms with most of the world. But when he *did* take a grudge, it was hard to shake him out of it.

This feud with Staire had not in its origin any definite grudge. It had begun, perhaps, on Staire's side rather than on his own. In their first term at Crale there had been a game of football in which Cole had played well and Staire badly. Staire fancied that Jeremy laughed at him—which it is possible that Jeremy did. Staire then named Jeremy "The Farmer," and it was considered in Staire's set that young Cole was too plebeian for anything.

But it all went deeper than this. Jeremy hated Staire—and could find no true reason for it. There was nothing against Staire. He bullied occasionally, but so did Jeremy, in a thoughtless, exuberant fashion.

He had a very good opinion of himself, but so also had Jeremy—about certain things, at any rate. Staire had his following of toadies, but so had Jeremy—especially in the football term. Staire was generous, on the whole kindly and decent-minded. It was perhaps his "Style" that angered Jeremy. Staire "had a leg." In any gathering of boys anywhere you would notice him, while Jeremy, unless on the football field, was never noticeable.

Then Staire knew the world. He had been born in Vienna, where his father, now retired and an M.F.H. in Leicestershire, had been in the Diplomatic Service. He had travelled with his parents through most of Europe—and Jeremy, of course, had been nowhere.

But it went deeper than these things. It was as though there had been war between the two through countless ages, and both recognized this.

And it was as though Fate intended them to be foes. Jeremy had often noticed the way in which they were pushed at one another. The feud, for the most part, made him miserable, although there were times when his battle-instinct yielded him a kind of fierce joy. But he would wish to be at peace with all men—something lazy in his character here.

Staire, on the other hand, loved it all. He despised Stocky Cole absolutely. Everything about him seemed to Staire's elegance contemptible—his thickness, awkwardness, childish "ragging" fits and the absurd people he chose as his friends. Only his football was not contemptible. But that was a kind of knack. Staire had a deep scorn of Rugby football because, himself, he played it so badly. Cricket now—there was a gentleman's game!

So they stood, the two of them.

3

"I think it's ripping," said Gauntlet. "I wonder if Marlowe would sell."

"I bet it cost a good bit," said Jeremy.

"Oh, I don't know. I expect Marlowe prigged it out of his aunt's bedroom or something. I'll offer him a quid."

"Those old things," said Jeremy, standing, his legs spread and his hands in his pockets, and speaking with an air of profound wisdom, "are worth lots more than a quid."

"I bet it's a fake," said Gauntlet. "They fake

everything nowadays. They stick bits of wood under manure-heaps and it comes out all brown, and then they punch little holes into the wood to make it worm-eaten. I bet it's a fake."

The door opened and Marlowe came in. He was the type of boy who is often caricatured in stories of public-school life. He was bony, ill-clothed and wore large spectacles. He had the look of an elderly and patient sheep. He resembled the sinister M. Verloc in that he seemed " to have wallowed all night on an unmade bed." He was a very quiet boy and suffered perpetual insult without complaint. He was known to the world at large as " The Sheep," and spent his day in an atmosphere of constantly recurring " Baas."

He did not, however, appear to be unhappy, unless possibly when the centre of a Lower School football " scrum." He hated all games, and read without cessation.

" Hullo, Marlowe ! " Gauntlet said genially. " What a ripping desk ! "

" Yes, isn't it ? " said Marlowe, smiling faintly.

" Do you want it ? " asked Gauntlet.

" Do I want it ? " repeated Marlowe, bewildered.

" Yes, wouldn't you like to sell it ? "

" Oh, no, thanks."

" I'll give you a quid for it."

" Oh, no, thanks."

" And you could have my table and everything on it."

" Oh, *no*, thanks. I wouldn't really. Thanks most awfully." Marlowe moved quickly and sat down in front of his precious prize as though to protect it.

"I bet it's a fake."

"Oh, no, it isn't."

"I bet it is."

"It isn't, really."

"You can see it is—anybody can."

"Oh, no, they can't. We've had it ever so long at home."

"I'll give you a quid for it."

"Oh, no, thanks."

"I will, really. I'll get it from Ma Bender to-night."

"Oh, *no*, thanks most awfully."

Gauntlet ceased. He would bide his time.

The passage outside the Study rocked with noise. Heavy bodies bumped against the thin woodwork, boots tramped as though they would burst the flooring, shouts and cries and yells—and then, bellowing above the babel: "Fag! Fag! Fag! Fag wanted!"

Boys were thronging Coulter's; through the open window the smack-smack of the fives balls could be heard against the stone, and the white clouds sailed quietly on, piling now into high cumuli above the trees, looking down on the fields, the lanes and the long sunlit plain to the sea.

There were twenty minutes before dinner. Jeremy thought he would go and see how the Upper Fields were looking.

He tumbled out into the passage. "Hullo, Stocky! Stocky! Stocky, you ass! . . ." But he pushed through, down the stairs, along the passage until he came to the Games Board.

No, First Game wasn't yet posted.

Terrible disappointment were he not playing! First Game at the beginning of the term consisted of two matches, Possibles *v.* Probables and Whites *v.* Colours. Four scrum-halves would be needed and he would be surely one of the four. Forsyte, Conrad, himself, and perhaps Haslewood. But what he wanted was that he should be in the Possibles *v.* Probables match. That was watched more closely than the other. Haseton, the scrum-half of last year's team, had left in the summer, but the danger was Forsyte who, although he hadn't been given his colours, had played for the team on several occasions last season and was unfortunately in Bunt's House, and Bunt, being Games Master, would naturally try to push him in.

"However," thought Jeremy, "of course I can't expect to play for the School this year." Nevertheless he did, in his secret heart, expect to. He was a better scrum-half than Forsyte, any day. And who else was there? Conrad was a funk and Haslewood was a three-quarter by rights.

He passed on into Coulter's and forgot all about football. It was always so with him. He never thought about anything for five minutes together. Life was much too exciting. Thoughts came and went like flashing fish in a pool. Anyone who fancies that either Staire or football dominated him knows but little of a small boy's mind. Concentration! Concentration! Who ever knew a boy concentrate on anything save the matter immediately in hand? And a good thing too!

He stayed for a moment and watched Halleran in the knock-up fives game. He was in the same

Form now as Halleran! That hero! Comic thought! Halleran was now in his element, his great clumsy body suddenly lithe and truly proportioned. You would not have thought that anyone so heavy could move so quickly, nor his sluggish, slothful countenance shine forth so intelligently!

Jeremy moved on to the Upper Fields. Behind was the grand, towering pile of the School, the Chapel in its centre, the sixteenth-century house, once part of a monastery, now the Head Master's house, and then the old buildings of different periods; but all achieving a marvellous and beautiful proportion, stretching out like wings, high and splendid on its hill above the sea, so that for many miles around it men would lift up their eyes and say "Aye, that's Crale. Best school in the country, I reckon."

But Jeremy was not thinking of the School. He was not even thinking of the Upper Fields. He had certainly no eyes for the tawny-crested trees. He did not even hear the clamp-clamp of the sea against the Raglan Rocks far below him.

He was hungry, frightfully, awfully hungry. He didn't care whether it was mutton and squashed flies. He didn't care what it was. He could eat anything. And after dinner he would go to Garrett's, the Tuck Shop, and would have four doughnuts, three bars of pink chocolate-cream and a stick of "Devona," this last warranted to endure, if sucked judiciously, for an hour at least. He turned to cross the Gridiron and—of all fearful things—ran straight into the legs and gown of "The Camel" himself!

The Reverend Charles Daime, for the last fifteen years head master of Crale, was six-foot-four, and bony. He bent a little from the shoulders and would throw his head forward as though he were searching for something. To the Lower School he was something remote, divine, God-like. They never saw him save in Chapel and on big public occasions. The legends concerning him were as many as the sands of the sea, as, for instance, that he ate monkeys for his breakfast, slept on two beds end to end because one was not long enough, and knew by heart every book that had ever been printed.

They knew, however, that he was the most successful Head Crale had ever possessed, and they worshipped him.

Jeremy choked. Folds of gown enveloped him. A cool, strong hand detached him.

"Well, Cole, going to knock me down?"

So the Camel knew who he was.

"Oh, no, sir!" Jeremy, crimson, giggled like an idiot.

"How's the football?"

"All right, sir."

"Glad to hear it. Glad to hear it." And the Camel swept on.

Golly! The Camel knew him! The Camel had asked about his football! The Camel knew him!

He stared like one in a dream. If he didn't play decently this term, well, he'd bury himself!

Yes, he would. He'd jolly well . . .

His hunger returned.

CHAPTER II

HOUSE

I

UPON that same afternoon, at exactly four of the clock, the Upper Fourth were sitting awaiting the entrance of their form-master, Mr. Parlow.

This was the first occasion of their meeting, because on the first morning of the winter term the School divided into their various Houses and did its best with a General Knowledge paper.

At the beginning of every winter term every form was born anew. Boys who had been prominent leaders during the last year had now moved into other worlds; dunces who had kicked their heels for so many months on back benches were now surprisingly promoted into the middle of the room. The new and untried quality was now, nervously erect, against the back wall and there they would remain until the term's close.

Jeremy Cole had his place between Askwith of Bunt's and Cumberlege of Frost's. As for weeks and weeks these two were to be his neighbours, their habits, characteristics and personalities were of some importance to him. Askwith he had never

seen before and he decided at once that he didn't like him. He was a pale, freckled boy, with an ingratiating manner. Cumberlege was thick and stocky like himself; he knew him. Not a bad footballer. Stupid. Destined very possibly to play during the term the rôle of Form fool. Parlow, Jeremy had heard, always selected someone for that office.

Four desks away was Staire, looking, Jeremy considered, as "sidey" as possible. Half-way down the room, lounging back against the desk behind him, was big Halleran, the Fives Captain. Some thirty boys in all.

There was a church-time hush as the door opened and Parlow entered. Parlow was a big, stout, clean-shaven man with a red face. His reputation on the whole was a good one. There was nothing against him save that he was said to make favourites, but that was considered on the whole rather human of him. He wasn't one of those "sarcastic devils" like Fynes or Mortimer. He was interested in games, gave decent teas with plenty of food, and sometimes in form read out of good books like Kipling and Haggard. He had the deuce of a temper and at times could be heard shouting right across Coulter's. He swore finely and had a sense of humour. All this Jeremy had gathered from others.

He came in, settled his bulky form behind his desk and looked about him.

"Well, yes," he said, staring at them.

"New boys stand up!" he commanded.

They stood up.

"A nice lot! A nice, bright-looking lot!"

The senior boys in the form were turning round and looking at them. Jeremy wished that he were taller. His head came only just above his desk.

"Do I know any of you?"

He stared at them one by one.

"I know you, Cole. And you, Staire. Have you come here to work or play games?"

Neither answered.

"Halleran, you tell them. What do *you* come here for?"

Everyone giggled. Halleran mumbled in his throat.

"Well, Cole. Which is it to be?"

"Please, sir, both," said Jeremy gulping.

"Hum, yes. . . . As this is a football term I shall keep my eyes on you. Sorry cricket is finished for the time being, Staire?"

"Yes, sir."

"You're a bright-looking boy." He fixed his large, round, child-like eyes upon Cumberlege. "What's your name?"

"Please, sir, Cumberlege, sir."

"Yes. I hope you're smarter than you look!"

A relieved laugh from the form at this. The fool for the term had been appointed.

"Now, boys, listen to me. You've got to work. When I say work, I mean exactly that—work. Great fun pretending to work; but you won't find it easy to catch me out. You can try, if you like, but I really advise you not to. Besides, work's worth while. You may think it isn't. Games much more important, the only thing, in fact, you come to school for. But it *isn't* the only thing.

It's quite possible to do both, and as far as being useful in the world afterwards goes work will get you on quite as well as games will. But that isn't the point just now. I'm here to see that you do work and I mean to do it. That's all. Now get to it!"

And they got to it.

That hour was history. Period James II and William and Mary. Parlow had a way with him of making these people live. He read to them part of Macaulay's death of Charles II. Then he told them what he thought about James II, told them very succinctly, not mincing his words. He told them something of the period—read a little Pepys and a little Evelyn. The hour was over almost before it had begun.

Outside, on the way up to the French class, Halleran stopped Jeremy.

"Hullo, kid."

"Hullo," said Jeremy, dreadfully embarrassed.

"You've got a chance of being School Half this term."

"Have I?"

"Yes, you have; and I'll damned well give you a damned good hiding if you miss it!"

"Thanks," said Jeremy, terribly pleased.

Going upstairs Jeremy found himself next to Staire. It was embarrassing for both of them, but Staire was, of course, complete master of the situation.

"Hullo, Cole!"

"Hullo, Staire!"

"Had good hols?"

"Yes, thanks."

Staire spoke airily, superbly, as a country gentleman might unbend graciously to one of his villagers, and Jeremy hated him for it.

"So did I. We went to Dieppe."

"Decent paddling there, wasn't there?" said Jeremy, and then ran swiftly upstairs.

Perhaps Staire had meant the advance as an offer of truce, but if he had, why had he spoken as though he were the King of England? Who was he, anyway? Just because his father was a baronet. Anyone could be a baronet these days. And an odd wave of hot affection for his own father came over him, his own father of whom he was not proud, with whom he was always at odds. But he'd rather have him than Staire's father. He'd show Staire....

But M. Forain awaited him. M. Forain and the first chapter of "Tartarin."

2

By general agreement the best hours of the winter term were those that followed Last School and preceded First Prep.

Last School was over at six, First Prep. was at eight. Two glorious, fuggy, stuffing, guzzling, fighting hours.

They had been fine enough in the days before a Study, but now! Now, when you need no longer have tea in the Dining Hall with all the Lower School of the House; when you could make your own toast, brew your own tea, dig into your own jam, slap on your own potted meat; when, toast in one

hand, tea in the other, you could, uninterrupted by the vulgar mob, devour "Monte Cristo"; when you could listen to the rabble that kicked and pushed against the skirting of the wall and be safe and preserved against their vulgarity; when you could hear the gas so cosily hissing and the small (very small) fire so intimately spitting; when, if guests intruded upon you, you could either kick them out (good for warming the blood), or invite them in with all the courtesy of the perfect host; when, hearing that long wailing cry of "Fag!" go echoing down the passage, you need no longer listen save for the luxurious memory of those old dead and vanished days of serfdom; when, if the storms were blowing up from the sea, you could hear the rain as it lashed the window panes and could fancy with what white fury the waves were now hurling themselves over the rocks far below; when you could gorge and gorge and gorge adding strawberry jam to the next best butter and sardines to the strawberry jam and Dundee Cake to the Sardines and Chicken and Ham potted meat to the Dundee cake; when you could hear the old school clock striking the quarters and someone singing in strident discordance and someone else mournfully practising the fiddle; and then again the grasping fingers of the wind upon the pane—ah, these were hours, blessed, noble, care-free hours!

Jeremy had the capacity beyond most mortal humans of savouring the full enjoyment of the immediate moment. When he was happy he was tremendously happy. He remembered not past unhappinesses, nor the threats of the future over-

hanging hour. For him there were no future hours. He sunk his whole weight deep, deep down into the present and there wallowed.

It was not "Monte Cristo" that he was at the moment reading, but a story called "Kronstadt," by that glorious author of "The Iron Pirate," Mr. Max Pemberton. It was a story about that fascinating country Russia with its snows and knouts, its spies and Siberia. It concerned a lovely English governess who had an unfortunate taste for abstracting private documents of the highest military importance. Jeremy thought her splendid but tiresome. He came to the end of the chapter. He pulled himself up out of Russia and surveyed the little room with an intense, proprietary pleasure.

Gauntlet was absent. Marlowe was bending over his beautiful bureau absorbed in a book.

The long, spiny body, the hunched shoulders, protruding ears, intrigued Jeremy. He threw a French grammar at them. Marlowe's mild, bespectacled sheep-face turned towards him.

"I say—you're always reading. What'll you do when there aren't any books left?"

Marlowe giggled, his silly irritating giggle.

"There'll always be books," he said.

"Yes, but don't you ever want to do anything else?"

"Else than what?"

"Read."

Marlowe blinked behind his glasses; "I want to write."

"Write what?"

"Write stories. . . . I'm in the middle of one

now. . . ." Then suddenly perceiving the dangerous nature of his confidence: "Oh, I say, Cole, you won't tell anyone, will you?"

"No, I won't tell anyone. Let's see it."

Marlowe, greatly agitated, dug deep into the bureau and produced a bundle of dirty-looking papers. Jeremy took them gingerly. On the outside page in very uneven, printed letters stood:

ARNADO THE FEARLESS

A ROMANCE
OF THE DAYS OF
GUY FAWKES.

There were many pages.

"Golly!" said Jeremy. "Did you write all this?"

"Yes," said Marlowe.

"Can I read it?"

"Yes, if you like." Then he urged again, "You won't tell anyone, will you? They'd rag me frightfully if they knew."

"No. Didn't I say I wouldn't? Fancy your writing all that! Where do you get it from?"

"I don't know," said Marlowe. "It just comes."

Marlowe took back his precious papers and hid them again in the desk.

Jeremy regarded him with a new interest.

"Don't you ever want to play games?"

"I hate games."

"You'll get ill one day and die," said Jeremy seriously, "if you don't play games."

"I don't care," said Marlowe defiantly; "I'd rather die than play football."

"Why are you such an ass?" inquired Jeremy. "Chaps just can't help kicking you. I don't mind you, but I want to kick you often. You look such a fool."

"Yes, I know I do," said Marlowe. "But I won't be one always. I'll be remembered when everyone here will be forgotten."

"Perhaps you will," said Jeremy reflectively, "if you can write all that stuff. But it's not much use being remembered after you're dead, if you're kicked all the time you're alive."

"Yes, it is!" said Marlowe ardently. "Every great writer's been bullied and neglected first. You're having your time now. I'll have mine later on."

"Good heavens!" said Jeremy. "Do you think you're a great writer?"

"I'm not now," answered Marlowe modestly; "but I will be later."

Here was strange food for thought. The despised and rejected Marlowe considered himself a great swell.

He was aware with a suddenness that really startled him that when you had settled for yourself that someone was an ass, the matter was not, in truth, finally decided. The ass might have quite another opinion; and, in reverse, when you thought yourself splendid, someone else might think *you* an ass!

All this was interesting. In truth Jeremy was greatly intrigued by the discovery that Marlowe

was a writer. There was a side of himself of which he never consciously thought, but a side of which he was occasionally most sharply aware—something in him of which he was exceedingly shy, and concerning which he would speak to no one in the world, not to Uncle Samuel, not even to himself. This was the part of him that loved the woods round Polchester, the Cathedral where once he had seen the Black Bishop, the Sea Captain in whose company he had once almost absconded, Rafiel by the sea, the farm where, as small children, they had stayed in the summer; and, when it came to small things, horse-chestnuts, skies of red and orange, trees blown by the wind, Orange Street shining after rain, fires of autumn leaves, Spring flowers, his elder sister dressed for a party, his mother's rings, books in shining bindings, running without clothes on the sands beyond Rafiel and so on and so on . . . all the things that Uncle Samuel alone in the family understood.

As he had grown and the school life had slowly, relentlessly moulded him, Jeremy had become more and more ashamed of these inner stirrings. No one at school but would rag him unmercifully were they known. His most intimate friend, Jumbo Payne, had never experienced these excitements. Jeremy felt now that they were something "soppy," "girlish," weak and feeble. He would have killed them an he could, but, in spite of himself, at the oddest moments, when he least expected them, up they would spring, stirring him altogether in spite of himself.

And now Sheep Marlowe, of all people, had

moved him again! To write a real book, to write pages and pages, to give it a name, to invent it all out of your head. . . . He sat there balancing on his chair, staring at that bent, spiny back, those protruding ears. To be remembered after the rest were forgotten! It was a rum world. Sheep to be remembered! Sheep! A rum world! With a sigh back he turned to "Kronstadt."

3

A head was poked in through the door, McCormick.

"I say, Cole, Leeson wants to see you."

"Wants to see *me?*"

"Yes! Now! I've just been with him. He wants you *now*."

"Oh, lord! What's he want to see me about?"

"I don't know. Your bizz, not mine."

McCormick vanished.

Leeson was not popular with his House. He was nicknamed "Paddy" because he went round the dormitories after lights were out to see whether things were as they should be, and wore soft slippers for the occasion.

Jeremy had seen but little of him during these three years. He had been "whacked" by him twice, given tea by Mrs. Leeson three times and exhorted by Leeson once a week during a whole term before Confirmation. It was the last of these that had caused Jeremy's very soul to squirm. He didn't mind so much that he should be rebuked for forgetting his Catechism, but when it came

to asking him intimate questions about " the Purity of his Body "—a phrase that meant nothing to him hidden as it was beneath Leeson's chaste reticences but, when interpreted afterwards by friends and companions, meant all kinds of things—from that moment Jeremy had detested Leeson.

He went now most reluctantly. What did Paddy want to badger him for on the very first day of term ? What had he done wrong already ? He threw his mind over the events of last night and to-day and could discover no crime. There had been too many things to do and think about. There had been no time for mischief. And why snatch from him his Study hour—at the very moment too when the governess had been discovered thieving by her lover ? A rotten shame, and one more count against Leeson.

He slouched through the noisy school building into the chaste, deadened privacy of Leeson's quarters. He knocked on Leeson's door, then entered.

Leeson was alone, his long, black, clerical form bent over his table, letter-writing. Leeson was one of those tall, blue-black clergymen who look like an advertisement for Waterman Co.'s fountain pens. His Study had large photographs of Rome and Athens, busts of Sophocles and Julius Cæsar, and many rows of theological volumes.

Jeremy waited.

Leeson looked up. " Ah, Cole, I wanted to speak to you."

" Yes, sir," said Jeremy.

" Had good holidays ? "

"Yes, sir, thank you."

"People all well?"

"Yes, sir, thank you."

"Glad to be back?"

"Yes, sir, thank you."

There was a pause.

"Well, let me see——" Leeson stood now in front of the fire-place, his long, thin, black legs spread wide.

"You're in a Study this term?"

"Yes, sir."

"With—let me see—with whom?"

"Gauntlet Major and Marlowe, sir."

"Ah, yes. Gauntlet Major and Marlowe. Yes. Quite. You got your House Fifteen last winter, I think?"

"Second House, sir."

"Ah, yes. You've got a good chance for First House this year?"

"Yes, sir, I think so, sir."

"I'm informed that they may even play you for the School."

Jeremy's heart beat. He said nothing.

"How old are you?"

"Fifteen and three-quarters."

"Ah, yes. Let me see. You're small for your age."

"Yes, sir."

Leeson's voice suddenly changed. There was a most surprising twinkle in his eye. Jeremy had never seen it there before.

"How do you like this school, Cole?"

"Like it, sir?"

"Yes, are you happy here?"

"Very happy, thank you, sir."

"Proud of the school?"

Jeremy was uncomfortable and rubbed his boots together. "I suppose so, sir, I hadn't thought of it exactly."

"Quite, quite." Leeson's voice was friendly, familiar, intimate. "Well, it's time you did. You're beginning to have influence. And especially in the House. Do you like the House?"

"Oh, it's all right, sir."

"I see—no especial feelings about it. Naturally. Well, it's time you did have some special feelings about it. And how do you feel about me?"

This was awful. Jeremy hung his head and muttered.

"Exactly. You think me a tiresome ass. Quite. It's natural that you *should* think so and even right that you should, during your first years here. Things work more easily that way."

"Yes, sir," said Jeremy, being apparently expected to say something.

"But I'm *not* a tiresome ass: at least, it isn't any longer a good thing that you should think me so. And I'll tell you why. Because from now on, you and I have got to work to some extent together and there's no hope of our doing that if we don't see one another sympathetically."

"No, sir," said Jeremy.

"You see, it's like this. During your first year or two at a school of this sort you're passive—just stuff for the school to work on. The school catches you up like a sausage-machine and turns you from

the conceited little pup that you were when you left your private into something else—something that it can use both for itself and for something wider and deeper than itself."

"Yes, sir," said Jeremy, looking at Julius Cæsar in a kind of trance.

"But then the day comes," Leeson went on, "when it's time for *you* to do something! You've got to come in and add something. From that moment the future of the school will depend to a certain extent on what you are, and everything you do will affect its future.

"This school, which has been going on, in one sort of way or another, ever since the Eleventh Century, on this very spot, hasn't made itself; it's been made by the boys who have cared for it and have done something for it. Its influence is increasing, and so your influence through it is increasing. People are always wanting to be immortal. Well, here's as good a chance for immortality as I know. Do something decent for this school and you do something decent for yourself, for England and for everyone who comes after you here. That's worth while, it seems to me."

"Yes, sir," said Jeremy.

"Yes, and there's more than that in it," Leeson went on. "There's your immediate influence here in this House. Now this House mayn't seem much to you. It isn't more than fifty years old. It's ugly to look at. It isn't even very architecturally sound. It's seemed to you, so far, just a place to rag in, eat and sleep in. But if you can do something for the School, far more can you do

something for the House. Here your influence is immediate. Everyone knows you. Everyone watches you. The smaller boys admire you because you're a good footballer. From now on you're going to matter a lot to this House, one way or the other, and it's just as well that you should know it."

"Yes, sir," said Jeremy.

"That's why you've got to understand me a little. There are many boys I wouldn't talk to like this. It would make them priggish and self-conscious. They'd think themselves potential Napoleons, or, worse still, little angels. But I've no fear of your taking yourself too seriously; in fact, the danger is just the other way. I fancy, for instance, this evening that you've heard hardly a word that I've been saying. All the same it will stick in your head more than you imagine."

"Yes, sir," said Jeremy.

"And if I've been studying you I want you to pay me the compliment of studying me in return a little. I know what you think of me. Old 'Paddy' Leeson who goes round the dormitories after dark in soft slippers. Well, that may or may not be true. Anyway, that isn't the whole truth about me. I love this House better than I've ever loved anything in my life except my wife. I've made plenty of mistakes and will make plenty more, but I shall make less if you help me. I'm not proposing any change in our relations except this: that you should think of me as a human being, not a pious humbug; and that, secondly, you should realize that if in three years' time you leave this school without having done anything decent either

for it or the House, you'll have a crime on your conscience. Yes. Well . . . Come and see me when you want to."

"Yes, sir," said Jeremy.

Leeson held out his hand. Jeremy shook it and shuffled out of the room.

4

Back in his part of the house he shook his head as a dog does when he comes out of the water. He walked out into Coulter's. The stars were coming out in their myriads. It was an evening of marvellous softness. All the sounds came gently, the very rhythmic murmur of the sea, the muffled cries of boys behind the walls, the distant banging of doors, the wheels of a cart crunching down the country road.

But Jeremy heard none of them. He stood staring out into the dusky playing fields, his hands plunged in his pockets. Had old Paddy been pulling his leg? Was this some plot to get him to do something pious, look after the new kids and report to Paddy when there was a dormitory feast? Or was it straight? What was it Paddy had said? Jeremy couldn't remember a word except something about influence and helping the House. . . . Oh, yes, and looking on Paddy as a human being! That was rum.

He'd have to ask Jumbo about it. Whether Paddy was on the straight or no. . . .

But all this about the School. Of course he liked the School. Didn't he, if there was a match

on, shout for the School until he was blue in the face? Wouldn't he rather be here than any old Eton or Harrow or Rugby? Of course he would. All the same. . . . He felt a burden upon him. He wasn't as free as he had been. He was under some sort of responsibility, but *what* responsibility? He didn't know.

But Leeson wasn't quite the ass he'd thought him. Maybe it was only a tale that he came round the dormitories in soft slippers. Rotten shame that chaps should say so if it wasn't true!

Golly, what a lot of stars!

He went slowly in.

CHAPTER III

THE WAR OF THE SHEEP AND THE GOATS (1)

THE PICTURE

I

JEREMY played in the Possibles *v.* Probables game and did not in any particular way distinguish himself.

Nobody was distinguished. It was a mild and spiritless affair.

This was partly the result of the weather, which also was mild and spiritless, a thin, grey mist hanging over sea and land with no wind to blow it away.

It was also spiritless because of the new School Rugby Captain, Beltane. Beltane was a giant, six-foot-two in his socks and fourteen stone. He was to Jeremy and Jeremy's generation a grown man ; he was, in their opinion, considerably further advanced in man's estate than many of the old boys who came down on festival occasions.

Huge in bulk, he had a jolly, humorous and exceedingly intelligent face. He *was* intelligent, extremely so, and was expected to win magnificent University scholarships during this, his last year

at Crale. It was whispered that already he wrote for the London papers and was earning a fine income by so doing.

He was also an excellent Rugby forward, of a rather old-fashioned and shoving type, but he was too good-natured to make a good captain.

Priestley, last year's captain, a swift and lean three-quarter like a greyhound, had been a magnificent leader, cursing, encouraging, relentless, ubiquitous. Now, in the first game of the new season, everyone felt the difference. Beltane shoved well enough in the scrum and cursed volubly those near to him, but for some mysterious reason no one was afraid of him—and everyone was languid.

Jeremy was not happy with his partner half-back, who was never there to take a pass and, if he did have the ball on any occasion, always stuck to it too long. So, although Jeremy showed apparently any amount of energy, shouting in his funny, husky voice, "Coming in on the right, Possibles," and "Ball away!" and "Break! Break!" (like the pessimist in Lord Tennyson's poem); and although he fell on the ball in the most determined fashion, was kicked in every tender spot and had again and again to extricate himself from piles of bodies, he knew very well that he was not playing with his whole heart and soul.

He was in that state, only too well known to him, of divided interests, so that while his whole mind *seemed* to be on the game, half of it was away somewhere on a holiday of its own, considering the other game of Whites and Colours playing on a neighbouring field, considering the thin vapours of mist

behind which the trees stood with twisted arms like paralysed old men, considering tea and food and Parlow and Paddy—things and people that should have been far, far from his mind.

And at half-time he was irritated by Bunt, who had been one of the linesmen and now came hustling across the field to tell everyone what they ought to do. What he told Jeremy was that the main business of the scrum-half was to get the ball away to the stand-off-half and "see that he got his passes."

That's all very well, thought Jeremy, kicking his heels into the muddy ground, but what are you to do if the stand-off-half can't *take* a pass and if he's never in the position he ought to be in? And it was then that, turning round to gaze into distance at the other game, veiled in mist and played by shadows, the thought came to him (whence, how, why, he was never afterwards able to determine), "Steevens and I would play jolly well together." Now this was odder in that he had hardly ever seen Steevens (who was playing stand-off-half that afternoon in Colours *v.* Whites), had never played in a game with him, nor even spoken to him, Steevens being in Bunt's House. He was, moreover, a comparatively new boy, having come rather late to Crale.

Jeremy knew nothing whatever about him save that there had been a rumour towards the end of the preceding season that he played "rather a decent game."

And yet suddenly this thought came: "I'd play well with Steevens."

In later years, when the Cole-Steevens combination was England's hope at half-back for five successive years, Jeremy sometimes looked back to that afternoon and saw himself—small, filthy, plastered with mud, standing on that misty field, and behold, out of heaven as it were, Steevens descended upon him! Strange!

A sort of miracle!

2

After the game in the long changing-room Beltane spoke to Jeremy.

The changing-room was a dim passage-like place, with hot and cold showers and rows and rows of lockers and bare benches. It was dim because of clouds of steam, and in and out of the steam naked shoulders and thighs and buttocks, staring red faces matted with hair, white legs and arms like separate, animated automata protruded, flashed and vanished again.

"Here, Stocky Cole, rub me down!" Beltane shouted. He was standing under the shower, his thick, black hair tangled over his forehead, his great body strangely smooth and white in the shadow, the water hissing and splashing over him with a jerking fury as though it enjoyed its job. Jeremy, who had been dancing about waiting for his chance to dash in under a shower, took a towel and, as tradition had for a thousand years dictated, rubbed down his master's back and thighs. By rights he was now free of this service, but not for the worlds of Paradise would he have claimed his rights.

"You're a rum-looking kid," said Beltane, surveying him. "You're as broad as you're long." He condescended to feel his muscles. "Not bad. Not much fat." He punched Jeremy's belly and nearly drove the wind out of him. "Not bad," he repeated. Then, stretching his great arms and yawning, he said: "You and Abbott weren't much use this afternoon. What was the matter with you?"

"I don't think we suit each other very well."

"No, I don't think you do."

Jeremy pulled himself together, looked into Beltane's good-natured face; then said, marvelling at his own cheek:

"I believe I'd fit in very decently with Steevens."

"Steevens!" Beltane said, pulling his shirt over his head. "Why Steevens?"

"I don't know," said Jeremy, his voice suddenly deserting him and sounding like a frog's croak. "I'd like to try, though."

But Beltane said no more. His friend Mulligan was shouting to him and he shouting back again.

Jeremy was forgotten.

3

But Jeremy didn't forget. While he was dressing he thought of it; then as he strolled up to Leeson's to find Jumbo Payne; then as the two of them turned lazily, luxuriously (to-day was a blessed half-holiday) towards Garrett's, the Tuck-Shop:

"I say, Jumbo, I think I'd play awfully decently with Steevens."

A word about Jumbo Payne. He was a boy of no distinction whatever, still in Lower School although older than Jeremy, podgy in build, hair so fair that it was almost white, an amiable, sleepy countenance, in character silent and apparently somnolent.

He was, however, Jeremy's best friend. They had been friends now for three years. He had stayed with Jeremy's people at Polchester and Jeremy had stayed with Jumbo's aunt in Colchester (Jumbo was an orphan).

Theirs was not in any way a sentimental or romantic friendship. They simply liked being together, trusted one another completely; Jeremy talked and Jumbo listened. It might to a casual observer have seemed a one-sided friendship, because Jeremy was certainly the star and Jumbo the silent worshipper. Everything that Jeremy did seemed right to Jumbo, but he never flattered him or indulged his vanity. Jumbo, indeed, said very little at any time and dealt largely in monosyllables; but when he did give an opinion it was a startlingly honest one. Honesty was his supreme characteristic. He had no imagination and when Jeremy swung into dreams he was simply bewildered and uncomprehending, but he was a gentleman according to the code taught him by his father, a retired captain, a rolling stone, feckless and blundering but adored by his small son. Both the father and mother had died during an influenza epidemic when Jumbo, their only child, was six.

So much for Jumbo Payne, whom nobody in the school ever noticed save Jeremy. There was no

reason why you should notice him. His fat soft body, his mild round face seemed to melt into air as you watched it. He was distinguished in nothing, either in work or games. He never spoke unless he was spoken to. He had no hobbies, did not collect stamps or white mice, had apparently no enthusiasms and no regrets. He was Stocky Cole's friend. Otherwise he had no visible existence.

"Why Steevens?" he asked.

"I don't know," said Jeremy. "I suddenly thought of him at half-time."

"You weren't much good to-day," said Jumbo, who had watched the game.

"I know," said Jeremy. "But what can you do with an ass like Abbott? He can't hold the ball if you give it to him."

"Some of Staire's pals were standing near me," Jumbo went on dreamily. "They weren't half pleased at your playing so rottenly."

"I didn't play rottenly."

"Yes, you did."

"No, I didn't."

"Yes, you did. Everyone said you did."

Jeremy sighed. "Yes, I know. Beltane said so. I told him I ought to play with Steevens."

Jumbo showed mild surprise. "That was some cheek. What did he say?"

"Oh, nothing. I was rubbing him down. He didn't know I'd got a Study and I wasn't going to tell him. I like Beltane, only I don't think he'll make much of a captain. He's too soft. Chaps don't mind what he says. He says I haven't got

any fat, and I haven't either. Lucky he didn't see you stripped."

"I'm not fat," Jumbo said indignantly. This was the one reproach that he could never endure.

"Of course you are. Fat as an old hen! I say, what a scrum! Golly! Hullo, Swipes! . . . No, I didn't. Anyway, that was last term, and I bet one ginger-beer! . . ."

Garrett's was swimming with heat and company.

What Jeremy liked about Garrett's, although he couldn't have told you so, was the colour. It gleamed and glittered and glowed. Partly this was so because when it was filled with boys a sort of warm misty steam was generated, so that you saw everyone in a haze. Through this haze the rows of tinned things, fruits and potted meats and jams, with all their bright-coloured labels of rosy apples and crimson strawberries and Californian harvests and marvellous amber-shining pears, shone like jewels. Mother Garrett herself had cheeks as rosy as any apple and a bosom like a downy pillow. She was occupied, with two hand-maidens to help her, as surely no human being has ever been occupied before. She must not only answer the shouts and cries and appeals, but rebuke the forward, correct the dishonest, chasten the proud, collect the money and put on record all the involving debts. Tick was allowed, but only to a certain amount, and no recognized field of official diplomacy could place on record such attempts at passing the forbidden limit!

She made strange noises of excitement, commiseration, indignation and humour. The most

fantastic and indecent tales were told of her, creating her the Dame Quickly of her place and period. Heaven knows whether any of them were true. She had never been seen off duty. She lived in the village at the bottom of the hill—Pleasant Cove. She was reputed immensely rich. It was said that Bunt, who was known to have a Rabelaisian turn, when bored with Mrs. Bunt and all the little Bunts, would hie him to her cottage and there at her abounding fireside spin bawdy tales with her.

The uproar was titanic. "Mrs. Garrett, two Devonas. . . . Four bars chocolate-cream. . . . No, I swear I didn't. . . . It's a new term, isn't it? Well, then. . . . Look out, Sweaty, who are you barging? Five apples, two pine-apple squares. That's sixpence and two doughnuts tenpence and . . ."

The heat rose in a mist and a great, pulsing conviction of well-being and healthy satisfaction rose with it. About the counter itself boys were packed four deep, bodies pressed into bodies, excited crimson faces leaning forward, small boys trying to edge their way through big ones, and all the while Mrs. Garrett's rich deep voice: "Now, Mr. Chanter, that's only ninepence you give me! Yes, it is now! One at a time now! Can't 'ear oneself breathe!"

It was now, at this precise moment, that occurred the first incident—minute enough, as are many first incidents in great affairs—in that great and even now, after thirty years, although-traditional-yet-remembered battle with which Jeremy and this story have so much to do.

Jeremy was not so happy as he should be ; Jumbo's remarks about the football were rankling. He had known that he had not distinguished himself that afternoon, but he had not realized, until Jumbo put it so brutally, that his game had been *rotten*. He could trust Jumbo for the truth, but ere now he had noticed that Jumbo also, in a sort of excess of friendship, was given at times to an exaggeration of frankness. He thought that that had been the case now. After all, he couldn't have played so very badly. It wasn't his fault if Abbott couldn't hold a pass. . . . Nevertheless, he was sensitive. As he glanced about him he fancied that fellows were looking at him and whispering (they were, of course, doing nothing of the kind), " Stocky Cole's no good this year. He played a rotten game this afternoon. . . ."

The ginger-beer was as sawdust in his mouth, the doughnuts heavy and jamless. He was in the general press, and someone was breathing stertorously down his ear, and someone else was digging a sharp elbow into his back. He was stiff and sore after the game. Someone that afternoon had kicked him on the back of his head.

Then he heard, quite plainly, so that it was impossible to mistake it, the opprobrious epithet, " Farmer ! Farmer ! " and then, also unmistakable : " Who has to get up early to milk the cows ? "

He tried to turn round sharply to confront the insulter, but he could not shake himself free. When at last, all the angrier because of the delay, he worked his body about and glared on every side, no one seemed to be looking his way.

But there, not far from him, were Crumb and Baldock, two of Staire's most devoted adjutants. He stared at them, waiting for them to take up his challenge, but they were busied with ginger-beer. He fancied that they were laughing at him, but he could prove nothing.

Longing to be enraged with something or somebody, he grunted to Payne :

" I'm sick of this ; I'm going ; " and slipped away.

4

This anger of his had a strange result. He went to the Study and found no one there. It was as cold and desolate as the grave. He looked at his table, and a dreary, naked and ink-soiled affair it was. He felt an urgent need to assert himself, to do something aggressive and defiant. He'd give them " Farmer," and show them how much he cared for *their* opinion ! The back of his head ached and he had eaten too many doughnuts too quickly. So he went to his play-box and fetched out Uncle Samuel's picture.

He felt an instant's dismay when he looked at it. It certainly was *rum*. He turned it up and turned it down. He brushed the glass with his hand and dusted the frame with his very dirty handkerchief. It was a *nice* frame. That was, on the whole, the best thing that you could say about it. Why did Uncle Samuel paint like that ? He couldn't really think that that was the way things looked. After all, sheep had tails and legs ; and why was the field so red and the trees so purple,

and what was that violet splodge right in the picture's middle ?

Looking at it, he nearly returned it to the play-box. Then his obstinacy supported him. There was no other fellow in the whole school had a picture like that.

So he came with it and set it up on the table.

Somehow, there in the room, it didn't look so bad. It made a nice spot of bright colour. Then he saw, propped up in a corner, two letters. One was from his mother and the other, by a strange coincidence, was from Uncle Samuel himself. Uncle Samuel wrote to him often. Very odd letters, if you could *call* them letters ; they were more like diaries, or yet more as though Uncle Samuel was talking there in the room. They were written on rough bits of paper and began in the middle instead of like most letters at the beginning. As did this one :

Because I have a cold is no reason why your sister Helen should interrupt my work by offering me quinine. Your sister Helen is always doing things for other people that she may add to her own glory. Mind you, I don't say that that isn't the reason that most people do things for other people ; but Helen is, at present, young and hasn't yet learnt to hide her motives. I have one of those dripping colds and I hate being asked as to how it is getting on—which your mother, kind soul, is for ever doing.

Your mother, I may tell you, is missing you, and I suggest that next Sunday you write a little more than your usual blotty scribble with no news in it. You cling too nakedly to bald facts. Facts are nothing. Any

fact, if stared bravely in the face, will turn out not to be a fact at all. Believe me. Your uncle knows. Anyway, try and write to your mother as though you were a human being and not a jam-eating, football-playing automaton.

How are you enjoying yourself? Are you proud of your Study? Shall I send you a picture for it? I have three. You can choose. One is of your sister Mary reading a book. No one thinks it a good likeness, but I don't mind that because Mary is not actually in the picture; but she would be reading a book if she were. So that's all right. The second one is of "Cattle Drinking." One of my best. A nice arrangement in greens and blues. The cattle are blue and what they are drinking is green —not very healthy for them, but then cattle, I understand, can drink anything. The third is simply called "Sunrise." As you've always been too lazy to get up when the sun is rising, your criticisms will be meaningless to me. Your father thinks it's a football match, but as your father has never seen a football match, that's an easy mistake for him to make. Just write and say which you'd like.

Now I must tell you that your uncle is going to show his pictures all by himself in London. The London swells have invited him to do so and are taking all the risks, and people will pay sixpence to come in. Just think! You've been able to see all these pictures for nothing for ever so long and now everyone is going to pay sixpence! There's glory for you! Your father can't understand it. He'd pay sixpence not to see them. But there it is. It's an odd world and there are a great many different coloured fish in the sea.

I must also tell you that there's been a strange dog haunting our house and he's very like that late lamented hound Hamlet. He's just as ugly, but seems to have less conceit. He has appeared now three times, looking in at us through the gate. Your sister Mary has tried to lure him in with a bone, but it's you that he's looking for,

I imagine. If I get a chance to speak to him, I'll tell him where you are, and perhaps he'll come along and see you.

Canon Ronder condescended to come and have a meal with us the other day. You should have seen the fuss! He's very fat and enjoys his food. He even drank your father's dreadful wine with gusto. He invited himself in to see my pictures and said he liked them, but I don't think he's a sincere man. The women all adore him but you can take it from me that there's something wrong with a man whom women adore. He's a great swell with us now—ever since Brandon died. You can see that I don't like him. He's too neatly dressed for me.

And what else is there? Nothing, I think. My cold is dripping all over the paper. Now see that you write your mother a nice letter. And you can write me a short one, too. I say a short one because I've no time to read a long one. If your sister Helen offers me quinine again I shall strike her. Your sister Mary is writing a story and is turning blue all over because she licks her pencil so often.

Your loving Uncle
SAMUEL.

Jeremy had a spasm of homesickness when he read this letter. Lots of fellows he knew would think that an exceedingly silly letter, but for himself it had the effect of drawing him straight as though with a magnet into the scene that in spite of its many drawbacks he loved so well, the steep incline of Orange Street, the statue with its coat-tails, the green and leafy lanes leading right and left into the country, the cathedral towers with the sun on them, the house with the gate, and the conservatory with the coloured glass, the hall, and then Uncle Samuel's bare,

sunlit room and himself, stubby and thick in his blue painting smock. . . .

Four or five boys burst in shouting and laughing, Gauntlet, Staire's friends Crumb and Baldock and—good heavens!—Staire himself!

Jeremy realized at once that he was in the presence of the enemy, and he stiffened and bristled all over like a dog.

"Hullo, Cole!" Then they busied themselves with something that Gauntlet had to show them. Jeremy sat at his table, pretending to read, but in reality alert, vibrating with wariness.

Gauntlet talked with the voice that he always used for those whom he wished to please—a little self-deprecatory, a little flattering, a little eagerly pleasant.

"Oh, it isn't much," he was saying. "I've got better than that at home, but of course, Staire, you'd know more about that kind of thing. My governor collected drawings. He did really. He used to have ever so many, then he got tired of them and sold them."

Jeremy wasn't looking, but he knew that Staire was as conscious of himself as he was of Staire.

He could tell this by the pitch of Staire's voice. And although he wasn't looking, yet he could tell just how Staire was standing there, aloof, condescending, patronizing them all. How he loathed him!

Staire talked about his father rather as though no one had ever had a father before. He gave Gauntlet's possessions his benevolent blessing.

Then they turned round and considered Marlowe's marvellous desk. Staire didn't think much

of it. He'd seen many better. Still, it wasn't bad. Pretty swanky a fellow like The Sheep bringing a thing like that. Who did he think he was? Followed anecdotes about The Sheep, humorous and very unkind.

Then they turned to Jeremy. "Hullo, Cole—working?"

"Yes," said Jeremy.

"Resting after your football labours?" said Staire, and Crumb and Baldock tittered. Jeremy read on.

"Play a decent game this afternoon?" Staire inquired politely.

"Oh, shut it!" Jeremy growled. "Clear out, can't you?"

"Clear out!" said Staire. "Sorry we're in the way, but Gauntlet happened to have asked us in. His Study as well as yours, I believe."

Jeremy said nothing.

"How did our young half play this afternoon?" Staire went on.

Crumb and Baldock, who wanted to hang on to the outskirts of the fray rather than figure as its centre, giggled again but said nothing.

"I'm told he was not so good," Staire continued. "Rather mucked the thing up, I'm told. Of course, if a scrum-half funks going down to the ball . . ."

"I didn't funk," Jeremy growled.

"My mistake. I wasn't there, of course. Only what I was told." Then he saw the picture.

"Good heavens! What's that?" They all crowded forward.

"Is this a picture that I see before me?"

Staire stood back and struck an attitude. "Certainly it's got a frame, but otherwise . . . Dear me, Cole, is that your effort ?"

"Oh, shut up !" Jeremy, red with anger, swung round. "You think you're awfully funny, don't you, Staire ? Well, you aren't. Not funny at all."

But the picture was delighting them all.

"And what is this picture *of ?*" Staire inquired politely. "I ought to know, but I don't. Perhaps it's the wrong way up !"

Jeremy then made a mistake. "It's sheep in a field," he said suddenly, seeing Uncle Samuel standing there at his side, close to him.

Roars of delight greeted this remark. "Sheep ! Oh, I say. Look at the sheep ! Come and look at the sheep !"

Jeremy sprang round upon them. He was angry enough anyway, but especially he was angry because it seemed that Uncle Samuel was standing there, hair dishevelled, paint on his cheek and saying to his young nephew: "That's a pretty good picture. You'll know one day. . . ."

"Look here ! You leave this alone. What business is it of yours ? Who asked your opinion ?"

But it had gone beyond the private view.

"Sheep ! Sheep ! Come and look at Stocky's sheep ! Anyone want some sheep ! Baa ! Baa ! Sheep ! Sheep !"

Baldock was closest, so Jeremy gave him a shove. Crumb made a snatch at the picture, and Jeremy made for him, hurling his body at him like a catapult.

Crumb fell over Jeremy, on top of him.

The Study door was open, and because it was approaching First Prep. multitudes of boys were thronging the passage.

Voices were shouting, "Sheep! Sheep! Baa! Baa! Baa!" Jeremy's table went over with a crash, then Gauntlet's. Faces were crowding the doorway. "What's up? What's the matter?"

Jeremy had pulled himself up from the floor, and, feeling now nothing but a Berserk rage, seeing only blindly in a confusion of dust and clothes and hair, seeking for Staire that he might pound his body into a fine jelly, hysterically shouted:

"Yah! Yah! Goats! Goats! Who's a dirty goat! Yak! Yak! Yak!"

This "Yak!" (destined to become so famous a war-cry) was evolved on the spur of the occasion and was compounded of anger, breathlessness, dust in the mouth, and once again, anger.

"What's up? What's the matter! . . . Come on, Stocky Cole's being murdered! Baa! Baa! Baa!"

Bodies tumbled, hurtling into the passage. Boys, passing, were carried into the conflict before they knew where they were. Others, attracted by the splendid noise, hurried up. It had been a day on the whole inclining to dullness. "Look out where you're going! Who are you barging? Sheep! Sheep! Goats! Goats! . . . What is it? What's the game? Baa! Baa! Baa!"

And now the passage, narrow and straitened as it was, held a fighting, struggling mass. Like the lovers at the close of the second act of the

"Meistersinger," Baldock and Crumb and Gauntlet had crept away, but Staire, who, to do him justice, loved a fight, was in full, struggling glory, shrieking curses, and Jeremy, fighting his way to him, his collar waving like a flag, was hitting right and left, shouting his battle-cry.

The noise was fearful. Behind the battle the Study, deserted and peaceful as a tomb, surveyed the evening sky.

The dust rose, the clamour echoed to the sky; small boys were trodden upon, big peace-loving boys were struck in the wind and fell gasping against the wall; warriors strode forward not knowing why they fought, but loving the conflict for its own good sake; buttons flew, collars erupted, shirts were rent, private feuds received a new lease of splendid life. "Baa! Baa! Baa! Yak! Yak! Yak!"

Shrieking voices carried the challenges, knowing nothing of what they conveyed.

Then a stronger cry than all arose.

"Paddy! Paddy! 'ware Paddy!"

In an instant of time figures were fleeing in every direction. In another instant the passage was empty. Carrying forward once again the Meistersinger's story, Leeson, his own Nightwatchman, appeared.

Not a soul to be seen.

Silence!

The bell clanged out for First Prep.

CHAPTER IV

RIDLEY

I

IT was during the last space before actual waking that the sea seemed to come right up to Jeremy's very feet.

Leeson was a fanatic about fresh air (not in those days so obvious a matter of faith as now), and every window in every dormitory in his house had all night its "top off" as Jeremy's erudite sister Mary, thinking of boiled eggs, once defined it.

On stormy nights the roar of the sea was something that would have disturbed new boys for hours had not their bodies been so weary and their souls so oppressively exhausted that sleep they must have, were the Last Trump sounding in their ears. Even in the smoothest summer weather the purr and murmur of it rustled about the beds and sang into the pillows.

There was not a boy but loved the sound of it, fine or storm, before he had been long at Crale —and there are those of us who, all our days, will miss it at waking.

There were nights when Jeremy dreamed his very body and soul away; others when weariness

was so heavy that the iron gates dropped down, and drugged with deep heaviness he lay, a little corpse. On the nights when the dreams came the sea came with them, sometimes not until the last, the water rushing up, splashing fan-wise in stretches of green and emerald over the flat, shining rocks, tearing the shingle, then sighing again with an ironic croon of disillusionment.

Wherever he had been until then, riding a gigantic white elephant through a jungle of tea-leaves; kicking Staire down an endless flight of glassy stairs; having tea with Uncle Samuel in a balloon like a football and waiting with panic and dismay for the god-like boot that was to descend and kick them both into space; or presenting Leeson with a bill for damages, a bill so long that it stretched across Coulter's and the tail of it fell over the rocks and into the sea; or swinging like a monkey from tree to tree, through a garden of purple trees and white hyacinth—always the end of it was this sharp plunge into salt water, first to sink into dark green depths, then to rise and so, borne on the breast of a giant wave, be carried like an emperor, far up the shore.

The clanging of the bell sounded even through the rush of the surge. But knowing it for what it was, he would yet struggle on not to recognize it, clinging with his naked toes to the bare glittering rocks, shouting his defiance to a relentless wall of rock that mounted and mounted. . . .

His last and most desperate hold was through his sense of smell. The salt, savourless tang of wet seaweed that popped under your thumb, the crisp,

fierce, cold-white salt of the stinging wave, the glass-like surface smell of the wet rock, hard and cool as your own naked shoulder, the warm crumbling smell of the hot sand, myriad-shining under a fierce sun, the pink echoing scent of the shells, too faint to be named a smell, too friendly to be disregarded; then, best of all, the warm, smacking smell of the roaring sun on back and buttock, like the tang of friendly fingers, and the hot, dry contact of sunburnt arm against sunburnt arm; last of all the dry, papery smell of the shirt that had been lying sun-bathed on the rock as you pulled it over your head, sinking for a moment your nose and eyes and mouth into that choking, clothy odour, starchy and homely with the sudden, sharp, cold contact of your fingers against the round, white buttons. . . .

Again and again Jeremy had all this in his nostrils before he took the last leap into active consciousness —then the clang of the bell scattered it to nothing and yawning, rubbing his eyes, in another instant he was out on the floor, his night-shirt flapping about his calves, pouring the water from the shining tin can into the shining tin basin.

So little time was there between the shrill summons of the beastly bell and the moment of Call-Over (which *was*, in truth, but a moment, so that it would be missed only too easily, and the consequences of that missing only too irritating) that no one had a thought of conversation. Everywhere water was splashing in and out of basins; some boys stripped, some boys didn't. Some, and these, for the most part, the harassed new ones, were always later than they ought to be.

Every dormitory held a cubicle and every cubicle sheltered the magnificent body of a sixth form senior. And it was somebody's duty to bring that majesty hot water in a lordly jug, but, thank heaven, it was Jeremy's duty no longer.

Just now it was the duty of a small, round, fluffy new boy who was like a ball of worsted or a startled canary or a persecuted dormouse. Jeremy was vaguely aware of him as he scuttled down the passage between the beds and the basins with the can of hot water. In the distance he heard him cursed, and thanked his destiny that he himself was a new boy no longer.

He had, in fact, reduced this five-minutes' dressing to an exact science: an instant from bed to washing-stand, an instant pouring out the water, an instant naked and chill with all the breezes of heaven about your body, then shirt, trousers, collar and tie as though you were one of those music-hall men whose profession it is to be Napoleon, George Washington and Henry Irving (hat, wig and waistcoat complete) in one blinding flash. To such a science had he brought this that he could afford now to clean his teeth, a process that he oddly and obscurely enjoyed—oddly because there was no other boy in Leeson's who did not either avoid it altogether or curse it for a grandmotherly penance.

Then, dragging on coat and waistcoat at one and the same moment, he would be across the passage and down the stairs and waiting in Long Hall for Call-Over or ever the First Prep. Master (poor, yawning devil!) had turned the corner.

He prided himself on his discipline. Save once when he had been on the sick-list with chickenpox he had never missed a Call-Over—yes, something efficient about that!

But First Prep. was a horrible affair. Our more recent and saner education has decided that it is not the wisest thing in the world for small boys from eight years upward to sit in an icy cold class-room, without food in their stomachs, at seven of a winter's morning. The tradition was fine, even though in the discipline of it infants caught maladies that lasted them a life-time. Jeremy caught nothing during this chilly hour, not even education. He was always at this time but half awake, and had the long bare room been warm he and his fifty companions would, master or no master, have happily slumbered. But your position, huddle though you might over your book, was, as it were, peaked on an iceberg. There was humiliation in it, too, for this was the only hour of the day when the Middle Form Study boys were compelled to prepare with the common herd. Common they looked to Jeremy, faces white and drawn under the hissing gas. He was no snob, but it's amazing what two days in a study can do for you!

This morning he was in no way tempted to slumber, not because fifteen lines of The Georgics compelled his attention, but rather that he had matters of the very gravest import to consider.

But before he could put his mind truly into these he was disturbed by a kind of sniffling, whistling noise close at his side. He looked around him with a sort of burglar-like agility, a grace and artifice

acquired by all small boys, so that you may do anything from "noughts and crosses" and gambling halfpennies to carrying on an exchange of notes with a correspondent half a room away and yet, it seems, not wink so much as an eyelid.

So, studying attentively his Georgics, he realized that the sniffling came from the same small, round, fluffy new boy who had carried that morning the Dormitory Head's hot water.

Crale, at this period of its life, had not developed the magnificent separated Preparatory Department that it now possesses, and infants were hurled into the maelstrom of its turbulent life their lips yet wet with their mother's milk.

This child, as Jeremy observed, was eleven at the most and looked considerably younger than that. His clothes, dusty and dishevelled, were huddled on to him, his hair was ruffled, his collar stained with ink, and yet, with all this, as Jeremy yet farther observed, he looked a clean sort of kid and a decent.

Jeremy had no sentiment about suffering new boys. He had been through it himself and thought it quite natural that others should go through it, but something in the sound of that secretive, persistent sniffling both irritated and touched him. He scribbled on a scrap of paper—"Don't blub, the chaps will rag you if they hear you. Cole"—then twisted it into a dart and flicked it—brilliantly efficient with constant practice—on to the infant's book. It was picked up, read, then two large and watering eyes stared in his direction, a faint and ill-determined smile also came his way. He frowned back. He felt that he had been a fool. He was not

in any case going to have the kid trailing after him. But his purpose was accomplished.

The sniffling ceased

2

Meanwhile he had matters of the utmost importance to consider.

This row of the evening before threatened to develop into something of considerable seriousness. In its inception it had been so sudden that he could scarcely remember how it had all started. Over that picture of Uncle Samuel's of course, but that had been, like the origin of all great wars, a small spark to set the stack ablaze! Of course it was the fact that he and Staire had been spoiling for a fight for the last year; and if this had been simply a personal matter between the two of them—well, there was no harm in that. All to the good that it should come out into the open. But as a personal matter it was obviously not going to rest!

Already the whole of the Lower School in the House had taken it up, and this was only third day of Term!

It happened often enough towards the end of terms, when nerves were jaded and everyone was sick of the sight of everyone else, that small conflicts should break out, but so early as this!

The fact was, as he dimly recognized, that the younger half of the House had, during the last year, been taking sides in Orange-and-Lemon fashion behind either himself or Staire.

Staire, although unvindictive and not by nature

cruel, had always the attitude of Grand Seigneur to his rightful peasantry, while Jeremy was democratic, not from any set philosophy but rather from laziness and an easy good-humour. It was the "swell" thing to admire and follow Staire, the rebellious and defiant thing to believe in Stocky Cole. There was, further, the ancient rivalry of cricket and football, and beyond that, again, the eternal principle in the hearts of all small boys that they must follow something or somebody.

Had there been in Leeson's at that time other prominent middle-school figures, the rivalry would have been dissipated, but, by chance, there were none. The Middle and Lower School was a world to itself, with its own traditions, superstitious catchwords, codes of honour, and this world was, again, in every House separated from the worlds of the other Houses.

Well and good, then. But the trouble was that Jeremy did not want a "scrap" this term. For one thing it promised to be the most important term of his school life and all his energies must be concentrated on the football possibility. He was most anxious to come into no kind of conflict with the authorities. He had had, in the past, no small reputation as a disturber of the peace, but he had come back, after the thoughtful resolutions of these last holidays, with a resolve towards quiet and dignified conduct.

This resolve had been strangely strengthened by his odd conversation yesterday with Leeson. Of course Paddy had talked "an awful lot of rot" but there *had* been something in it. Paddy had

put him on his honour, as it were, and although he would never admit it to himself, his pride had been tickled by the suggestion that he was of influence now in the House's affairs.

Every reason, then, to have no sort of row this term ; and yet here, at the very start of things, was a row of the very first order promising !

Of course, if Staire and his set *wanted* to have a row they should have one. Jeremy would accept any challenge from anywhere—but he couldn't help but wish that they would think better of it !

Preparation was over. He hurried off to the study and there, lying on his table, was a large, not ill-drawn picture of a sheep with a human (more or less) face. And out of its mouth, balloon-wise, proceeded " baa's."

Gauntlet coming in, Jeremy showed it to him.

Gauntlet was non-committal. " Everyone's talking about last night," he said.

" Well, it wasn't my fault," Jeremy said defiantly.

" Of course it wasn't," agreed Gauntlet. " All the same I'd stick that picture of your uncle's away."

" I'm blowed if I will," Jeremy answered hotly.

" Someone will come in and tear it up."

" Let them. My uncle's got dozens more."

" Has he ? " Gauntlet inquired politely.

" Look here," Jeremy said huskily, " if you want to be Staire's friend, you jolly-well can. You needn't think, just because we share a study, that you've got to be on my side."

Gauntlet faintly flushed. " I'm not on anybody's side. I think it's all awful rot. What have you got against Staire, Stocky ? "

"I don't know." Jeremy shuffled his feet. "He's all right, I suppose. What's he got against me, for that matter?"

"I don't think he's got anything," said the budding diplomatist. "I think he'd like you, if you'd let him."

"I'm not going to let him," said Jeremy. "I don't want Staire to like me."

"There you are, then," said Gauntlet. "It's your fault."

"No, it isn't," said Jeremy. "I don't like him, but I don't want to scrap with him all the time. I don't want to scrap with anyone this term."

"Shall I tell him that?" asked Gauntlet.

"No! I'm blowed if you will! He'll think I funk him."

"Oh, no, he won't," Gauntlet answered, a moment of real sincerity coming to him. "No one thinks you funk anything."

Here was a tribute, but Gauntlet's tributes were always suspect.

"You see," Gauntlet went on, "all the kids in the Lower School are keen as anything on you two keeping it up. It'll go awfully far if you don't stop it. Crumb and Baldock have been round already this morning making all the new kids swear that they loathe you or they'll get their bottoms kicked."

Jeremy swore in a fashion unknown to his relations. "If I catch Crumb——" he began.

"Morton and Frewer and some of the others have been just as bad on your side. It's pretty

rotten on the small kids because, whichever way they go, they'll get their bottoms kicked."

Jeremy frowned. He looked at Uncle Samuel's picture and wished it in the deeps of the sea. Then suddenly, for no obvious reason, he wanted to kick Gauntlet.

"And now you'll go and tell Staire everything we've said."

This roused Gauntlet, because it was exactly what he intended to do.

"Oh, if you're going to take it that way," he said, moving off, "settle your own mess."

"I never asked your advice anyway," said Jeremy.

"Who said you did? All right, you needn't get ratty."

"Who's ratty?"

"You are."

"No, I'm not."

"Of course you are," Gauntlet retorted. He had his final fling before he left the room. "That's just what's the matter with you. Think you're God Almighty!"

3

Yes, there was no doubt but that a new life was sweeping in on every side.

There was, for instance, Parlow to be considered. Two hours spent that morning in his educational company showed Jeremy one thing most plainly.

Parlow's liking for certain boys and dislike for others would be the most striking feature of that term's work. Parlow did not at first sight seem to

be the kind of man who would have favourites. Big and red and jolly-faced, you would have said, to look at him, that he would be fair above everything. Jeremy had, in the past, seen in dim distance Forrest who had had to leave, it was said, because his passion for favourite-making went to such lengths, and Forrest had been a little mousy, timid, large-spectacled creature. It was natural that he should be an ass. . . .

It was partly, perhaps, that Parlow put such energy and feeling into everything that he did. Chaps said that when he was angry the very room rocked with his shouts. To see him in his shirt-sleeves, glaring at an offender, was a sight worth going miles for, so everyone said!

And, on the other hand, Jeremy knew from the very first lesson that he had ever had with him how charming he could be!

He liked Parlow for this very naturalness. Normally he would have hated a master who made favourites—all boys do, but in Parlow's case it was not resented because behind it was a true, passionate admiration for good work, good play, courage and honesty. He didn't like boys for the silly, soppy reasons that moved masters like Forrest—because boys sucked up, were sycophantic, pretended to do anything that they were told. He would dislike a boy of that kind; he simply could not endure sluggishness, whether mental or physical, and any kind of cowardice was a red rag to him.

At the same time it was hard on the boys who were terrified by anger. They might be brave enough in other ways, but the sight of a raging bull (in whose

absolute power they were) simply paralysed them and scattered such brains as they had to splinters.

There was a boy in the form, Standing by name, who had already suffered a year of Parlow's hostility and Jeremy saw at once that the sound of Parlow's voice was enough to drive any idea out of his head. Jeremy could not understand being like that. If Parlow was going to rage at him, it would simply make him obstinate.

But Parlow was not going to rage at him. It was plain enough to everybody that, among the new boys in the form, Jeremy and Staire were to be the favourites. Here, once again, they were brought into rivalry.

Parlow treated them in different ways; he joked with Jeremy and was serious with Staire. It was clear enough that of the two boys Staire had the better brains. He had very good superficial brains indeed. His mind was accurate and clear. He did not work very hard, but fortune was always on his side in showing him the easiest way out. Mentally as well as physically he was neat and alert and extremely civilized. He could reject at once all the things that socially would be of no use to him. He thought clearly, because the thing itself mattered very little to him—the result of his making a success of the thing mattered everything. He was in this class as he was in his House, a little apart from everyone else, as though he were of another race.

Jeremy, on the other hand, was in the thick of it all. If he didn't grasp a point he fought to grasp it as though he were a bulldog hanging on to an enemy. His struggles were obvious to everyone,

and because they were courageous and honest they amused Parlow.

Sometimes he was slow and sometimes he was quick. Sometimes he was lost altogether. Sometimes the smallest detail would lead him astray so that he wandered miles afield. He didn't look like a poet, but beautiful things said and done and represented moved him as they would never in all his days move Staire. On this very morning Standing made some blunder over his Virgil and the tempest broke. Parlow's anger on this occasion was cold, icy, bitter. Standing, who was a thin, rather good-looking boy of Jeremy's age, sat down, white, his hand trembling against his desk. A moment later Jeremy, called on to translate, made a blunder similar to Standing's. Parlow, jokingly, abused him.

"You're an ass, Cole," he said. "But not such a silly ass as you want me to believe."

"Yes, sir," said Jeremy, and smiled. The whole form knew that Cole would be, this term, a thunder-averter. Good for Cole!

4

Coming out of class at mid-day he encountered Jumbo, and they walked together across Coulter's to the fields beyond, where, standing on a flat, ancient-looking rock, you could behold the sea.

To-day the sea was white and green like a ruffled parrot's wing, and the brown fields ran down to it, under the wind, as though driven with flicks of a giant's whip. The clouds came in galleons through

the trees, pressed full-sail, eager, urgent, hurrying about their business, and gulls were like fragments of these clouds scattered on the soil.

It was a fine day for energy and determination, and so Jeremy felt it; but, amazingly, Jumbo, the stolid and immovable Jumbo, felt it even more.

Yes, Jumbo was excited as Jeremy had never seen him before. The "scrap" of yesterday was the cause.

It seemed, although he had never said much about it, that he had always loathed Staire and resented his dominance. Now there was to be a fight, an open hand-to-hand fight, and he would be in it.

"It's all very well for you to talk," said Jeremy gloomily. "But it's no joke for me. There's Paddy just been jawing me about my being an influence in the House, and on the very second day of term I start what's going to be the worst row I've ever had."

"It isn't your fault," said Jumbo. "You didn't start it. He laughed at your uncle's painting." Then he added inconsequently: "What you ever stuck it up there for I can't imagine. You might have expected chaps would rag it. Anyway, there's no reason Staire should."

"A fat lot you know about painting," Jeremy answered rudely. "If you want to fight Staire, you can, and you'll be nicely licked, too. I don't want a row, what with the footer and everything. But of course, if he laughs at my uncle, he's asking for it."

Jumbo had stayed in Polchester and had met Uncle Samuel. Why Jeremy was so keen about him,

he did not understand. He had himself been afraid of him and thought him a dirty-looking man—the Arts meant less than nothing in Jumbo's life. But that was Jeremy's affair. He was Stocky's friend, and if someone laughed at Stocky's uncle that was enough.

He was, in fact, freshly alive. Eagerly he began to outline to Jeremy all his plans for the campaign. The thing was to organize the small kids. To find out exactly who were on the right side and who were not. To divide them into regular bands under proper commanders, so that they might perpetually harass and worry the enemy, to devise plots and scheme manœuvres. . . .

Jeremy cut his eagerness short. Jumbo, this morning, was irritating him exceedingly. Jumbo often did irritate him. Why? He was his best friend. They had been so much together that they ought to understand one another. Jeremy felt that he understood Jumbo down to his very last button, but Jumbo did not understand *him*. Why? What was lacking?

He was not in general a psychologist, but he did at this moment, his hair blown in the wind, facing the green and wrinkled sea, consider friendship.

He was anything but sentimental and yet he wished that, in one way or another, Jumbo was more important. Some fellows had marvellous friendships, friendships in which you talked about everything that was in your mind, and thought one another simply wonderful. He did not think Jumbo wonderful—not at all. Jumbo was Jumbo and never, no never, anything more.

He turned restlessly away and, as he moved, saw a boy near to him gazing at the sea.

At the instant that he saw this boy something happened to him. He stared at him as though he had known him all his life and yet, as far as he was aware, he had never seen him before.

The boy was considerably older than himself, thin, pale-faced, not in any way remarkable to look at. He stood, staring at the sea, motionless, absorbed. His face was reserved, quiet, and in some way remote and austere. Jeremy felt at once that this boy was everything that he would himself like to be. He did not know why he felt that; he simply was certain that he would listen to every word that this boy said as though it were Law. He was oddly and most unusually excited.

"I say," he twitched Jumbo's arm, "who's that?"

Jumbo, who was irritated because his warlike plans had been unexpectedly rebuffed, answered sulkily: "I don't know. Where?"

"Over there!"

"Oh, that. . . ." Jumbo studied him. "I know: he's a fellow in Frost's. He's in the Sixth. His name's Ridley."

"How do you know?"

"He goes to Toft for drawing when I do. He's jolly good, too. But that's all he *is* good at. He's awfully stuck-up. He never speaks to a soul."

Jeremy stared.

They walked away slowly. Jeremy stared back.

"He looks awfully decent."

"Oh, he's all right, I expect."

Jumbo turned once again to his plans. What had happened to Stocky ? Any other time he would have been as keen as anything at the prospect of a real rag. . . . Perhaps he wasn't well—had eaten too much. . . .

Jeremy frowned and kicked the turf with his boot.

Yes, that was what he would *like* to be. Quiet, dignified. Looking at the sea and thinking. His name was Ridley. In the Sixth. Frost's. Oh, what was the use ? He'd never meet him. Unless he took up drawing. But what was the good ? He couldn't draw for nuts.

Ridley. He'd like just to speak to him. But of course he never would. You never met fellows in another House unless you played in the same game or were in the same form. And the Sixth. . . . Miles and miles away.

He sighed then, ashamed of himself, ragged Jumbo, and they tumbled, like a couple of puppies, into the noisy confusion of Coulter's.

CHAPTER V

THE DORMOUSE

I

I WILL, I hope, be forgiven if, for a moment, I leave Jeremy and bring forward a very small, and in the eyes of most persons unimportant, individual who was, however, to play a considerable part in this crisis of Jeremy's life.

He did not, of course, know that. When he came to Crale he was aware of nothing but that he was going to an enchanting place where he would be for ever playing enchanting games. He had been there now for three days and had already discovered that he was slightly at fault in his anticipations.

His name was Charles Bentinck Morgan. His age was precisely eleven years and one month. He was the child already noticed by Jeremy, already nicknamed by his companions The Dormouse.

He was an only child. His father was a prosperous and honourable member of the London Stock Exchange, his mother a charming lady, first cousin of Janet Poole's. This is to imply that Charles Bentinck Morgan had spent those eleven years of his in the most perfect surroundings, hedged in

with people who loved him, who, indeed, adored him. Because he was an only child, and because there was no chance that there would ever be another, his father and mother worshipped him with a dangerous devotion, and yet they had not spoiled him.

He was not spoiled because he had a nature like a puppy's, happy, trusting and always on the side of good fortune. It seemed to him that life was a lovely affair. He could not conceive of anything better. He loved every dog and every dog loved him.

It was because he was an only child and had known every comfort and pleasure that his father decided not to send him to a private school (where he might be petted and indulged) but to plunge him at once into Crale.

His mother was afraid, but then all mothers are nervous. She was sure, moreover, that her husband was always right. Then young Charles's own supreme confidence confirmed theirs. Because he was an only child he had never had enough of the company of other children.

He loved other children, any child who would play with him. But in the big London house when children came they were inclined to be overwhelmed by the splendours and the ceremonies.

Charles, having been much with grown-up people, had an air of old-fashioned courtesy as host. There was always a little division between himself and the others. Down in Leicestershire it was the same. Although he had in himself no conceit or grandeur, his position isolated him.

Then, because he was a good deal alone, he lived much in his own imaginary world. His mother, who was beautiful and gentle, told him stories that had been told her in her own childhood, and she herself still half believed them. The two of them would sit on a summer's evening in the garden of the Leicestershire house and stare at the great oak on the lawn and watch the sky pale through the lattices of the dark leaves, and see the moon rise above the evening scent of the flowers. It seemed no unlikely moment for Oberon and Titania to appear. . . .

So it was time, perhaps, that Charles Bentinck Morgan should go to a real work-a-day school with no nonsense about it.

And indeed Charles Bentinck Morgan was panting with eagerness to be off!

2

He could not be as greatly distressed at leaving his mother as he ought to be. This departure seemed to him merely a beautiful interlude in a beautiful adventure. There would be boys, as many boys as he could possibly want. He imagined them to himself scattered all about the Leicestershire lawns, boys and boys and boys, all laughing and shouting, crammed with suggestions for new games so glorious that the day would never be long enough to enjoy the half of them.

His father had told him that there would also be work to do; he was not at all frightened at the prospect of that. He was very fond of reading,

had learnt a lot of poetry, and knew an astonishing amount of English History. Cœur-de-Lion, the Black Prince, Henry V, Nelson, Wellington were his familiar friends, and would often come and talk to him under the big oak on the Leicestershire lawn. No, if learning more about men like that was work he had nothing against it. . . .

His father took him down to Crale. Father and son were strangely alike. Morgan Senior was tall, which Morgan Junior was not, and Morgan Senior was not fat, which Morgan Junior at this moment, I am sorry to say, was inclined to be. But they both had the same fair hair, round, rosy faces, and a rather childish, baby-like stare in their blue eyes. They both gave an impression of supreme cleanliness and English unsubtlety. Morgan Senior was about as English as a human soul can manage, in these international days, to be; that is, he had no imagination but deep feelings, no strong perception of other psychologies, but a tender and almost feminine kindliness. He would not tread on a worm if he could help it, but would shoot thousands of birds, chase a fox all day, and torture a salmon for hours at the end of a rod and line. He was so honest that foreigners loved him and laughed at him. He adored England and patronized all other countries, without a doubt as to the justice of his patronage. He loved his wife and his child so deeply that he never said a word, or thought a thought about it.

Morgan Junior was like his father but *also* like his mother. He showed his feelings as his father had never done. He was the child of both his parents.

Arrived at Crale Mr. Morgan had tea with Mr. and Mrs. Leeson, received an impression of good English tradition and splendour from the Crale buildings and surroundings, and, tipping his son liberally, departed.

Young Charles, in the company of several other new boys, was led by Leeson into the Locker Room, where the Lower School boys had their kingdom. Each new boy was given a locker into which he might cast his cherished private possessions. Leeson then returned to further interviewing of anxious parents.

It was then that the Dormouse felt his first faint chill of apprehension, the first of all his young life. He was surprisingly aware that he missed his father and had a strange, choking sensation in his throat. The room was a babble of noise and, in the middle of this, the new boys clustered together like sheep in a pen.

But they did not cluster together in any very friendly fashion. Each regarded the other with acute suspicion, as though he was a spy or traitor. The Dormouse, looking at them, felt that none of them was exactly the friend that he would have chosen to play with him under the garden oak. The room was bare and ugly beyond belief, and the noise in some way fierce and alarming.

The boys, too, seemed to him all very large and strong. None of them looked at him with kindly, smiling face, nor did he feel that he wanted to join in their games, which seemed in a strange way to be compact of anger and insult.

Then someone cried: "I say! New boys!"

There was a rush in the direction of the helpless sheep, then a battering of noisy, mocking questions :

" What's your name ? "

" Who's your father ? "

" Who's your mother ? "

" When did you see your aunt last ? "

" Who did you kiss most before you left home ? "

The new boys received these questions each according to individual character. The most were terrified and showed it ; one with plastered, fair hair and a thin shaped face answered with eager sycophancy and in a moment had given some smutty reply. One boy stood frowning, answered nothing and when at last some one pinched his arm, let out wildly with his fists and was involved immediately in a confusion of dust, collars and jackets. One boy began to cry, which delighted everybody and they danced a ring round him, singing :

Cry-Baby, Cry-Baby,
Wants His Mammy,
Wants His Mammy,
Ooo ! Ooo ! Ooo !

Young Charles was at first unnoticed. He stood bewildered, staring wildly from one to another. Then a large, stout boy who seemed to be about to burst from his clothes discovered him.

" Hullo ! What's your name ? "

Terrified at the unkindly voice and threatening eyes he gulped :

" Charles Morgan."

" Charles Morgan ! Charles Morgan ! I say,

here's Charlie Morgan. What's your mother's name ? "

No answer.

Then he said something filthy and entirely beyond young Charles's comprehension.

No answer.

The boy caught his arm and twisted it. The noise now was deafening. No harm intended by anyone. A little natural jungle savagery.

Only a year or so before these same tyrants had been themselves the victims, had endured a week or two's exquisite misery and loneliness and helplessness and then, for the most part, passed into a noble and care-free independence. Moreover, no loneliness and isolation would ever again be quite so sharp and painful as this loneliness and isolation, so that these three weeks' gallantry made them free for ever of life—of its brutalities, selfishness, unconsidering cruelties. This great merit in our public school system then—it stiffens your back for anything. It is only the too imaginative who are more than temporarily bruised and even they not for ever. There are prizes for those who suffer the severest unknown to the others and it is these who often in the end love their school with the finest devotion.

But young Charlie Morgan might not see so far into the future. It is the tragedy of childhood that its catastrophes are eternal. And something, some confidence and pure happiness, departed there and then, in that Locker Room at Crale, from Charles Morgan's soul, never again to return.

His arm twisted, his body kicked, his hair tumbled,

he was at last flung back against a locker and so left and forgotten. The boy who cried was the most interesting. He was actually asking to be returned forthwith to his home and mother, the most amusing thing that a new boy can do.

Young Charlie stayed where he had been put. He did not cry; he did not move; he just stared in front of him. His collar was torn, there were large patches of dust on his trousers. His arm and legs ached. But he was conscious of none of this. He was only aware of one thing and one thing only, that he must return to the Leicestershire lawn with the utmost possible speed and *never*, never, NEVER, come near this place again.

3

After a while he realized that he was forgotten, and keeping close to the locker, as though the rest of the room were an open angry sea in whose waters he would inevitably be drowned, he crept to the door and passed out into a long and empty passage.

This passage was hung with overcoats; and, governed by the conviction that the only hope of safety was complete obscurity, he climbed on to the projecting boarding and then hid himself in one of the coats completely.

Here in this stuffy, choking darkness, he stayed trembling. Little shivers of apprehension ran through his body. He had the wisdom to know that he must not think of his mother or the gardens or his father because then he would cry, and he

was determined not to cry. That seemed to him the most important thing in all the world—that he should not cry.

Meanwhile an emotion, entirely new to him, was slowly dominating him—Fear.

It had always been proudly said of him at home that he did not know what fear was—and it was true. He had learnt to swim, to ride, to shoot, would face without a tremor the wildest-looking dog, had never, in his very youngest days, trembled at being left in the dark. He had trusted everyone and everything, so why should he fear ?

But now fear crept on him from every side. He was afraid because there was *no one* to turn to. As he had hung on to the lockers so now he clung to this coat, because one step meant danger. He was isolated utterly, and would be so isolated, it seemed, for ever and ever. The only thing—yes, the only thing—was, when no one was looking, to creep and creep until he found a door into the open and then to run and run and *run* until he was back under the oak in Leicestershire.

He was not, on this occasion, however, to be left long to his own reflections. He was found and dragged from his hiding-place by a boy whom all his life he would remember with loathing and horror, the boy already mentioned as an active adjutant of Staire, the boy Baldock.

Now Baldock was not at all a bad boy—not bad to look at, being brown and rosy like a pippin apple, not bad in character, being generous, humorous and ungrudging—but he had more energy than he knew how to use, no imagination, and at his present

wild age of fourteen or so, that proper allowance of unthinking cruelty that, let fond parents deny it or no, is contained broadly in the half-savage nature of all normal small boys.

Walking idly along he saw Charlie's boots protruding from beneath the coat. He dragged him out and pulled him to the ground. Charlie, dishevelled as he was, round and plump, fluffy-haired, wide-eyed and rosy-cheeked, had exactly that helpless immature look of a young bird fallen from its nest that appeals irresistibly to any young savage.

Really, if you had Baldock's exuberance and sense of fun, you would be compelled to do *something* to this helpless fledgling. So Baldock, grinning with innocent amusement, twisted Charlie's arms, squeezed his head under his arm, pinched his legs and in general playfully ill-treated him.

"You're just like a dormouse," he said, laughing. "Wake up! Wake up!" And he pulled his ears, as you dig a doll in its stomach to mark its squeal.

Baldock, as he looked at him, liked the kid. He dragged him along the corridor, pinching him as he went. A lucky find, this Dormouse should be his especial property.

4

No tortures, as sufferers in all Inquisitions have discovered, last for ever.

A new force soon seized the Dormouse—that of Routine.

There is nothing in after-life so sudden as that precipitant fall that a small child, hitherto an

individual and comparatively free, knows when, in an instant of time, he is caught by the machinery of a great Public School. For many boys, ignorant and bewildered, it is a relief; its penalty is that it catches personality by the throat and chokes it.

For the Dormouse, who had never found obedience to those he loved difficult, this sudden obedience to those he did not love (shadowy forms of dark, overwhelming power) only dumbly increased his despair. He was commanded to do this and he did it; to be here and he was here; but for the first time in his soul there was rebellion. Had his unhappiness been less, his rebellion would have been stronger. As it was he moved dumbly and blindly.

He became, for the time being, idiotic. It was as though he were moving in a foreign country whose language he did not know. He did not understand the simplest words that were spoken to him. He started with terror when anyone addressed him. He had only one thought—to escape from that horrible place at the first possible moment.

He had, however, from the beginning, a sense of the hugeness of the school and of his own minute size in relation to it. There was his own immediate world of the Locker Room, vast enough in itself, then beyond that was his House, then beyond that again the School itself. At the bottom of this towering structure he moved, a tiny midge.

One mercy at least he was granted, the terrible Baldock was not in his dormitory. On that first night he huddled into bed, thankful beyond all

possible words to escape attention. He had promised his mother that each night he would say his prayers. He tried to do so, cowering under the sheets, but could remember nothing, not even the Lord's Prayer. But no one spoke to him, no one tormented him.

He awoke to the sound of the sea. He was unaccustomed to that and for a while lay there, unable to remember where he was. Then, with an agony of apprehension it came to him. All this coming day he would be at someone's mercy unless he could succeed in escaping. When the bell clanged he was ordered to fetch hot water from the bath-room at the end of the passage for the Dormitory Prefect. He hastened as though his life depended on being in time, and then, in the cubicle surveying what seemed to him a touzel-headed man sitting up in bed and yawning, terror seized him again. He could only stand there and stare.

Someone roared at him. He put down the jug and crept away. His fingers refused to clothe him. Everyone pulling on coat and waistcoat was rushing from the room.

He arrived in time, but the Call-Over master selected him from everyone because of his untidiness. And indeed he was untidy with his hair unbrushed, his collar torn, his trousers stained with dust.

All day confusion deepened. He was hurried here, there, everywhere—first to this class-room, then that, pushed into crowds, dragged out of them again, ordered here, ordered there, all, as it seemed, without either plan or reason.

Fear and Bewilderment! Bewilderment and Fear!

His fear was justified. In the evening, after tea, Baldock (shouting with pleasure) found him. A ring was made around him and the points of a Dormouse were emphasized with indecency and brutality. He was asked repeatedly as to whether he were awake or no and was pinched in every part of his body to make this certain.

Evening Preparation came and he sat, a pile of brand new books before him, hungry, cold and desperately tired. He did not understand in the least what work he had to do and did not care. All that he wanted was to sleep. And so he slept, his head on the wooden table.

A gigantic Baldock stood over him, growing ever larger and larger. Baldock was shouting at him and then pushing him into a deep lake filled with black ink. With a cry he awoke and found that it was not Baldock who stood over him but the Preparation Master.

"What do you think you're here for?" he asked him.

Once more he was so deeply terrified that he could say nothing. This Master was the same who had taken early Call-Over. He remembered him.

"What's your name?"

The Dormouse stammered his name.

"Not made a very good beginning, have you?"

The Dormouse stared and stared.

"You're not at home now, you know."

No, indeed, he was not. He realized that.

"Yes, you look sleepy, I must say."

One of those small boys who never misses an opportunity of being on social terms with a master piped up :

" Yes, sir. He's called The Dormouse, sir."

There was a general titter. Anything is welcome that breaks Preparation monotony.

" All right. That will do. . . . Well, you'd better go to bed, Morgan. I'll tell your form-master that I sent you."

So, publicly disgraced, the Dormouse crept away.

There came then the morning when waking early, listening to the roar and plunge of the sea, quite suddenly he began to cry. He hadn't cried until now. Now, his head buried in the clothes, he cried and cried.

It was at Preparation on this morning that Jeremy heard him snivelling and threw him his note.

5

In spite of his bewilderment and fear certain figures had been made already apparent to him, and Jeremy was one of these.

There was much talk in the Locker Room about Stocky Cole and the possibility of his winning his School Colours this term. Some thought " yes " and some thought " no." Some praised Stocky, some abused him, but he was a figure in the Locker Room.

When, therefore, the Dormouse read that fragment of badly-scrawled-upon paper something happened to him—Stocky Cole became, in that immediate and actual moment, his God.

On the preceding evening he had been involved, his luck being just now entirely out, in the opening sheep-and-goat skirmish. Someone from some murky distance had shouted " Fag " and someone close to him had given him a shove, telling him it was his " Call."

He had moved blindly forward, always with that precipitate and nervous movement that was quickly becoming second nature with him.

He had been bright and sharp enough at home, but in this place it seemed that, hurry as he might, he must be always behindhand. Everyone cursed him for slowness ; it was partly perhaps that, in his bewilderment, he took so many wrong turnings, moving for ever in a labyrinth of indistinguishable paths. He didn't know ; indeed, he hadn't time to think.

On this occasion, hearing the cry of " Fag " forever gathering volume (seeming to be, through all the murkiness, very especially directed at himself) he ran, bumping into mysterious bodies and bumping out again, knocking against corners, tumbling over boxes.

He found the Study and there, standing in front of a fire, naked to the waist, rubbing himself with a towel, was an enormous creature who shouted something that to the Dormouse sounded the wildest " Brekekek-Koax.". . .

" Yes, sir," breathlessly stammered the Dormouse, and started running again.

It wasn't until he had tumbled some distance into further obscurity that he realized that he did not know what it was that he was going for.

It might be hot-water, it might be eggs, jam, hair-brushes, boot-polish, white mice or a fire-extinguisher. He did not know. He stopped, his heart thumping into his legs, partly with fear of doing the wrong thing, partly with running.

A moment later the avalanche had caught him. The passage was filled with shouting and screaming bodies. Some one caught him by the hair and screamed "Baa" in his ear, and for a moment a lovely sense of battle seized him and he was happy as he had not been since his first coming to this place. He knew rage, so infinitely finer a feeling than sycophancy. In his own modest way he kicked and pummelled anything that came in his direction, uttering short, sharp battle-cries.

His part of the passage was a hot and lusty mêlée, friend and foe indistinguishable. You fought for fighting's own sake and wished it might last for ever.

Swiftly, though, there were cries of "Paddy" and the Dormouse found himself, as now he was always finding himself, the last of everyone and only away just in time as the long, lean, awe-inspiring figure came round the corner.

That evening he learnt something of the meaning of the battle.

The small fry in the Locker Room were vastly stirred and excited so deeply as to forget for a moment the tyrannies of caste and to admit the new boys into their confidence.

It was all, as it seemed, an outcome of an ancient quarrel between Stocky Cole and Red Staire, a really awful quarrel. "They simply couldn't stick

one another," and it seemed that it was your absolute duty immediately to take sides. If, in fact, Preparation had not sternly intervened, the quarrel would have broken out again there and then in the Locker Room.

Like the strange mediæval parties in "Sordello" you simply had to be at one another's throat even though the purpose of your quarrel might be obscure.

It was not, however, obscure to the Dormouse even before Jeremy had thrown his note at him. Baldock, he had already sufficiently learned, was Red Staire's friend and supporter. Quite enough for him to be at once and decisively on the other side.

But *after* that morning incident he would permit himself to be drawn and quartered (or, as he had read, the worst punishment of all, to be pinioned for months under a drip of water which, at horrible last, dug a hole into your head) willingly, yes and eagerly, for his hero.

And, in fact, the drawing and quartering came more swiftly than he had anticipated.

On that evening, after tea, the older boys of the Locker Room were to be observed passing mysteriously from group to group.

The shifty-eyed new boy whose name was Ellys-Roberts, whose character, it was at once apparent, was as shifty as his eyes, informed the Dormouse that he would soon have to declare on whose side he was—Staire's or Cole's—"and it doesn't much matter which side you're on—you'll get whacked anyway. I think Staire's side is safer."

Staire's side, whether safer or no, on this evening

was first in the field, and Baldock had, of course, very soon detected the Dormouse. He advanced towards him, as he always did, with a joyous, friendly air as of one who loved his fellow men. And he *did* love the Dormouse, who added yet another zest to his already extremely zestful life.

And the Dormouse was now even more lovable than he had been three days ago, being now quite thoroughly awake, even though dazzled by the new light. His dishevelled, tumbled, blinking downiness was an admirable subject for torture. Such a little twist of the arm, such a minute threat brought so swiftly that look of terror into the eye, that shrinking of the quite defenceless body.

So Baldock grinned, caught the Dormouse's arm and twisted it, and then explained to him that his name was now being added to a dirty, tumbled piece of paper in Baldock's hand as of one who swore death to Stocky Cole and all his filthy crowd of sheep!

The Dormouse blinked and Baldock, with further twists of the arm, explained his purpose.

Then the Dormouse, pulling together all his scattered wits and defying his aching arm, his trembling knees, and the threat of tears, said:

"I won't!"

"Won't what?"

"Won't say what you want. I'm on Cole's side!"

Amazement robbed Baldock of words. At last he gasped:

"What!"

"I'm on Cole's side!"

"I say, listen! Here's the Dormouse says he's on Stocky's side. He defies us! The Dormouse defies us! *Our* Dormouse defies us! . . . Oh my! Oh crikey! Ye gods and little fishes!"

A pushing, laughing crowd surrounded the Dormouse and informed him as to what would happen if he persisted in this. Crumb, a worse fellow than Baldock, white and puffy of face, white and puffy of body and soul, gave a minute description of the following tortures: the torture of the Electric Eel, the torture of the Fizzling Pants, the torture of the Twisted Towel, the torture of Jumping Frog. . . .

The Dormouse listened.

"Well," said Baldock, smiling at him. "You see what'll happen to you if you stick to Cole. He's in a Study now. He won't be able to protect you. Besides, he wouldn't bother anyway. Nobody knows or cares what goes on in the Locker Room."

The Dormouse blinked but said nothing.

Baldock, slightly irritated because it seemed that he was being made a fool of before his friends, repeated:

"Will you swear death to Cole and all his set?"

The Dormouse, to his own private surprise, gulped out firmly:

"No, I won't!"

What might have happened then no one knows. A sudden shout from another direction carried everyone away.

The Dormouse remained, his teeth chattering, ready for martyrdom.

CHAPTER VI

THE GAME AGAINST RADDAN

I

ON the third Saturday of term there were two matches, the First Fifteen at home against Merripath First, the Second away at Raddan.

The two teams were posted up on the Wednesday, and Jeremy, joining the little crowd around the Boards, found that he was in the game against Raddan.

At first he was conscious of a sharp stab of disappointment. At the beginning of last season the sight of his name in the Second Fifteen had swelled him with pride and joy, now he was chagrined. Then, looking again, he saw that Steevens's name was down with his at half.

So that chance remark of his in the Changing Room had borne fruit!

Not wishing to risk a new experiment in a First Fifteen match, they were going to see, in the comparative safety of a Second, how it was likely to work.

How it was likely to work! He became of a sudden strangely apprehensive. This had, after

all, been only his idea, come upon him from the Lord knew where! He had never encountered Steevens personally, had no idea what he thought about it!

Then, turning, he saw that Steevens himself was at his side, also looking at the board. Rather shyly he approached him.

"I say, they're playing us together in the Second."

"Yes. What's the idea?"

"Don't know. Suppose they thought they'd try it."

They looked awkwardly at one another. In all the many years' football relations they were to have together Jeremy was never to know, beyond the football itself, any more of Steevens than he knew at that moment. There was, perhaps, nothing more to know. He was a thin, sandy-haired, pale-faced, spindle-shanked boy with colourless eyes and a receding chin. He was to prove himself a great artist in one thing—Rugby football—and in that he was an artist as Cortot on the piano, Casals on the 'cello. An artist of that order—reserved, delicate, strong and furiously self-controlled. Well, one art is enough, but Rugby football does not, alas, last for ever. . . .

Steevens, later a clerk in the Foreign Office, may have permitted Mrs. Steevens and the little Steevenses a glimpse of his divine fire. No other ever perceived it. But at once Jeremy achieved with him football intimacy. During all their times together they never spoke of anything else, never thought of anything else. Even here, Steevens

never betrayed either excitement or enthusiasm. He had, as no other footballer ever known to Jeremy had (and before the close of his football career there was no type of footballer unknown to him), an inner, inspired wisdom in the game. He had a foreknowledge of movements, developments, crises that was nothing less than supernatural. He had no conceit—that would be for him too exciting an emotion; but he played like a prince among commoners.

He was, at the moment of this game against Raddan, almost unknown at Crale. He had, as I have already said, come late to the school. To the last he remained impersonal, colourless, uninteresting. He had genius in this one thing, and, as it is so often with genius, it came upon him as something exterior, in no way transmuting the stuff of his personality.

Jeremy's alarm, however, grew as the three days passed. How did he know that this experiment would work, and, if it did not work, if they failed as a pair at Raddan, then it might well be that he would be condemned to the Second Fifteen for the rest of the season.

Oh, well, he could wait; but he did not want to wait for another season. For him waiting was always a difficult thing.

2

Saturday was a beautiful day, one of those milky-warm, golden days of early October that are among the best in England.

Jeremy thought of the weather, however, technically. It would be a dry day with little wind, and that suited him.

It should not be a difficult game. Raddan was a school only half the size of Crale, and Raddan's First always played Crale's Second. Crale had lost last year and Jeremy remembered the game very vividly. It had been his first game in the Second and he had received a nasty kick in the thigh, which had hampered him for weeks afterwards.

His spirits were not raised at all when he heard that Bunt was going over to Raddan with them. Bunt was all right, but he thought he knew more about the game than he did (Rugby football had changed since his day, and he had not kept pace with the changes), and then he always wanted the boys of his own House in the team.

If Jeremy played well Bunt would be honest enough to applaud him (and, indeed, his enthusiasms were frequently absurd), but let Jeremy play badly and no one would hear the last of it. One game was enough for Bunt, and let him make up his mind, he was as obstinate as a mule about changing it.

Then Bunt was a roaring, noisy kind of fellow like a bull in face, figure and temper. He had a hearty way with him, when he was in good spirits, of clapping you on the back, hitting you in the stomach and roaring with merriment. A man of little dignity.

Twelve o'clock struck and it was time to be off —a short drive to Crale station, half an hour in

the train, and then another half-hour in the wagonette to Raddan.

Jeremy surveyed the rest of the team and didn't think much of them. The three-quarters especially were weak. What was the use, even though Steevens and himself played like angels, if the three-quarters didn't know what to do with the ball when they got it? A forward, Merriman, was captain, a big bullock of a boy in Bunt's House, a decent chap with a baseless optimism founded on perfect health. There would be no very intelligent commanding from his direction.

Then, when they climbed into the school-wagonette and started down the hill to the station, Jeremy's spirits rose. After all, it was a wonderful day, the sea was singing like a happy baby and little clouds like feathers fluttered "good-luck" above their heads. Going away for a match was always a kind of holiday. One suddenly saw things in proper proportion, and worries like the row with Staire and Paddy Leeson's patronage and Parlow's eccentricities dwindled into their proper size. Bunt, who swelled in his place like an image of prosperous British agriculture (he was got up in a wonderful red-brown tweed. Why will fat men always wear such gay colours?), was in the finest spirits, and everyone laughed at his jokes and said eagerly, "Yes, sir," and "No, sir," and thought him the most awful fool.

Then there was the little Crale station, like a deserted packing-case left by someone in the middle of the sloping hill, and beyond it the sea, encircled by the gorse-flaming moor, purple as Homer's

warriors loved it to be. Then you might look back up the hill and see Crale piled high, pearl-grey, nobly commanding the world. You had, in spite of yourself, a thrill of pride that you belonged to it. Inside you were lost in the bowels of it and too deeply occupied to have time for pride about anything, but standing outside it, and yet being of it, you were allowed your haughty satisfaction.

Then crowding into the train, boy on the top of boy, shouting heads out of window, the train starting, the wind rushing past, the trees bending their heads, the colours of the fields and the gardens running up into shapes and patterns—yes, this was life, and life at its best and finest.

Bunt was in one compartment and Merriman in the other. Jeremy was with Bunt.

Bunt was one of those men who, after many years of schoolmastery, have yet never learned to be finally sure of their authority. It is always difficult for a man who cares for popularity to take risks, and without taking risks no one has ever yet been a true commander of boys. Bunt was not a true commander of anything because he adored to be liked, had created for himself a portrait of himself, genial, wise, far-seeing, generous and strong, and whenever this portrait was threatened he quailed, because the destruction of it meant death to his peace of mind.

There is nothing that boys detect more sharply in their elders than complacency, and nothing that they punish more mercilessly. They did not always punish Bunt ; there were times when his rubicund,

stout personality fitted the occasion, when his geniality was exactly what was required. Then boys, always acutely aware of the fitness of things, liked him and approved of him. But he must be backed by scholastic paraphernalia—stripped of them he was too obviously an ordinary weak and noisily nervous individual.

So now, trying to be authoritative, he failed. As with all masters who are not certain of their authority he fastened on the weakest boy for his target, the target that the other boys would join with him in shooting at.

But to-day they did not join. They were banded, as one man, against him. A boy, Colborne, full-back for the School Second, a grave solemn boy with a grand and ceremonious sense of humour, asked him questions of great absurdity with an anxious and friendly manner. Bunt knew that the questions were absurd, but did not know how to escape without either loss of temper or of dignity.

"Have you been in Switzerland, sir?"

"Yes, Colborne, yes. Why not?"

"And what is the highest mountain you have ever climbed, sir?"

"Ah, well—let me see. I can hardly claim any very great height."

"Never mind, sir, a little one will do."

"Well, let me see, let me see. I really rather forget——"

"Oh, sir, *do* remember. *Do* tell us——"

The whole carriage was intensely eager, leaning forward, serious faces, seriously waiting. . . .

Nobody enjoyed the occasion more deeply than did Jeremy. Nothing he loved better than ragging anybody or anything.

"I suppose you didn't go up in a railway, sir?" he asked with intense and eager interest.

Now this was cheek and Bunt knew it. But he smiled and tried to make a joke, and failed. Everyone laughed too heartily, as he also realized. He turned the subject, told an anecdote about a visit to India, a bathe in tropical waters and an approaching shark, and, at the end of it, Colborne remarked:

"I knew an old lady once, sir, who kept a shark as a pet," and began then a long and romantic story. At this, as everyone knew, he was a master, being able to work into his narrative a sequence of topical and even personal allusions which Bunt recognized but did not dare to drag into the open lest there should follow flat rebellion.

A miserable half-hour Bunt passed in that carriage, and yet that evening he would be describing to Mrs. Bunt, "A delightful day, my dear. In the train? . . . Oh, yes, behaved like angels. They always are with me. We understand one another."

They understood Bunt so well that on arrival at Scolar-Morton, the station for Raddan, everyone was in the highest spirits. Only over Jeremy a little cold shiver crept once again as they climbed into the Raddan wagonette. All right for the others, but for himself, yes, this game was of terrible importance. Bunt might be a fool, but he was able, all the same, to carry sufficiently authentic news back to Crale. He wouldn't love Jeremy any the better for that gentle jesting in the train.

And—there was no mistake about it—he did not feel in his true playing-form. It was always so at the beginning of a season. He hadn't had practice-games enough. It would be a week or two yet before he was in proper shape.

3

Raddan received them in a spirit of great excitement. This was one of the most important games of the year for them. It was true that it was only Crale's second team, but Crale was a school of so far greater an importance that Raddan's pride was not offended. After all there would be more than one boy in the Crale Second who, before the season was over, would be tried for the First. The Raddan boys were both younger and smaller. Such a boy as Merriman was a giant to the youngsters of Raddan. The whole school would be there in force to cheer their heroes onwards—and last year they had won eleven points to five. This year they should win by more than that.

The Crale team were received with first-class honours. The Raddan head master, Neilson, greeted them in his drawing-room, and Mrs. Neilson shook them all by the hand. They were taken round the school, shown the Chapel, the Library and the Gymnasium, and small boys stood, as they passed, and stared and made reverent comments.

Then at luncheon they all sat at the High Table (stared at throughout the meal by the school seated below them), were tempted to eat more than was good for them (a plot this, they were persuaded,

to spoil their game), and were forced to talk in a false-polite society murmur.

Greatly relieved were all of them when this was over and they were taken by school prefects into studies where they swopped anecdotes, masters' characters, and holiday experiences.

In spite of all this hospitality the Crale team were never entirely off their guard, but behaved rather as a tribe of Indians entertained by a hostile tribe to discuss terms of peace.

Jeremy, in especial, was reserved, dignified and taciturn. As the great moment approached he found himself becoming ever more nervous. He did not remember that he had ever been so nervous before a game. He looked again and again at the chilly and imperturbable Steevens. How was that going to turn out? Suppose that Steevens played gloriously but that he, himself, let him down? Then would he be more than ever disgraced. . . . Oh, what was he bothering about? Why *should* he play badly? And yet there were days, as he so very well knew, when simply *nothing* went right, when he could not hold the ball, when the opposing scrum-half was always there first, when the on-coming forwards seemed so fierce and gigantic that to go down to their rushes was nothing less than suicide.

Yes, the prospects were poor. . . . He went to change as though he were going to his execution.

Bunt, who had eaten and drunken splendidly at luncheon, came along to cheer them all up.

"Now, then, you fellows—how do you feel, fit?"

"Yes, sir."

"That's good! Remember what I've told you. Don't let the ball out in your own Twenty-Five. Keep the ball moving. Use your feet. Use your feet."

"Yes, sir."

He came upon Jeremy, who was struggling into his football-boots.

"Ah, Cole! Don't try too much on your own. Your job's to get the ball quickly off the ground and out to Steevens. You're a bit too fond of trying to cut through. No use being too clever, you know. Over-reach yourself."

Jeremy, who was bent double and purple in the face over his boot-tying, answered nothing.

Bunt, who always talked on until he encountered a reply either propitiatory or complimentary (silences made him uncomfortable), continued:

"I don't know what they're playing you and Steevens together for, myself. I was against it. However, in a match like this it doesn't matter much. Do your best, though. Do your best. Play for the School and not for yourself."

He looked up and waited and Jeremy said:

"Yes, sir!"

Bunt passed on. Silly old fool, thought Jeremy. That's a nice sort of way to cheer a fellow up just before a game. He walked to the field sulky and silent. He was aware of mysterious pains in his body, his boots did not fit, his head pains, he had a tickle in his nose. As he ran on to the ground with the others he was a rebel, a traitor, anything disgraceful and lonely. He hadn't a friend in the world.

Although the Crale team received a fine uproar of welcome, it was nothing to the shout that greeted the Raddan heroes. The whole school was there behind the ropes, from the oldest to the youngest. Some of them were very young indeed, piping and shrill-voiced, dancing like little wild animals behind the bars.

Bunt was a touch judge and very important and highly-coloured. One of the Raddan masters, a young, serious-looking man like a baby camel, was referee.

The whistle was blown and the game was started. A roar of "S-c-h-o-o-l," like the shriek of the wind, fluttered the air. A moment later a scrum was formed in mid-field. It was Jeremy's ball and he was shouting, "Left, Crale. Coming in left, Crale."

But he wasn't happy. Sometimes from the first blow of the whistle a kind of rhythmic content came and suffused him; everything was going to be perfect time and harmony, like a piece of beautiful music. It was not so to-day. He was conscious of everything, the long, level field, a hill shaped like a monkey beyond it, a cold piercing wind that had risen and now came dancing across the level as though especially to annoy him.

He knew too that it was a bad sign that he should be so unpleasantly aware of the Raddan scrum-half. There were many different ways of being aware of the opposing half and Jeremy knew them all. You could look at him and like him, think him a jolly fellow, want to get the better of him but have tea with him afterwards. Or you

could hate him at sight and with a cold steady enmity determine that he should be defeated. Or he could be a nonentity and not worth your consideration. Or he could be so fine a player and so completely on his game that you knew that it would take, as old Harry Vaughan used to say, " every grit at its grittiest " to get anything out of him. Or in the first instant you could discover that he was so bad a player and knew so little of the game that you would be able to experiment (Jeremy's greatest asset *and* greatest danger) to your soul's content.

All these were right ways to think of your opponent—the only wrong one was to funk him without faith or reason, and that was Jeremy's way to-day.

The Raddan scrum-half was a thick, strong boy with red hair and freckles. He had a very good idea of the game indeed. This was, of course, the days before the agile wing-forward made the life of the halves a devastating danger and an enterprising glory, but it mattered terribly how your forwards played in front of you, and it was very plain. In the first five minutes the Crale forwards were neither packing nor heeling successfully. The Raddan pack got the ball four times out of five, and when the game had gone ten minutes the ball was out and away to the Raddan three-quarters, who raced down the field with it as though there were no opposition at all, feinted the Crale full-back and sent in the Raddan right-wing for an easy try which was directly afterwards converted into a very pretty goal.

Raddan already five points ahead, and oh! the delight behind the ropes, the shrieks and yells and shouts of triumph! The bright-red brick of the school itself seemed to catch a ruddier glow!

Jeremy cursed deep in his heart. This was a nice beginning, and, although he had not been to blame, all the team would share in the disgrace. Suppose they returned to Crale that evening defeated by twenty points or more! He had lost (as he always did when the game had lasted a minute or two) all sense of his own individual success or failure. The thing was a machine now, and he was a part of it; but it was a rotten machine, creaking in every limb. No harmony, no rhythm anywhere.

Now, however, Crale played up a little, the forwards got the ball and Jeremy had some work to do. He did it without sting or fire, but he did realize that Steevens was a marvellous player! He *had* been right then in his instinct. Nothing could alter that now—Steevens was a *player!*

After twenty minutes (the game was half an hour each way) Raddan scored again, a scrambling try that was not converted. Eight points ahead! It was plain for all the world to see that the Crale three-quarters were of no use at all, a miserable, spineless lot. They stood bunched together, or, when they did get the ball, they passed straight down the field without gaining any ground and then tamely kicked into touch! They fumbled, dropped the ball forward, looked like frightened rabbits. It was lucky, indeed, that the Raddan three-quarters were nothing very marvellous. One really first-class Raddan three-quarter and—Birds

and Little Fishes!—the score they'd have run up!

So half-time came, and the Crale team sucked lemons in a dejected, back-biting group. It was then that Steevens sought Jeremy.

"That was a good save of yours just now."

Jeremy grunted.

"The threes are *rotten!*" Steevens spoke with the composure and indifference of a philosophic Brahmin.

"They are," said Jeremy disgustedly.

"Their threes are rotten, too," Steevens went on quietly. "No good at all."

"Yes," agreed Jeremy.

"We'd better do a bit on our own. Play our own game. It's no use passing to the threes all the time, when they can't do anything."

"No," said Jeremy.

And, after the first moment of the second half, he was aware of the difference! The player of Rugby football must, more completely, perhaps, than the player of any other game, fight for the team and not for himself, which is one reason among many another why Rugby football is the finest game in the world; but there always comes a time when the wise player, detecting his team's weakness and strength, must centre all his efforts towards a certain part of the field—and it may be, if the struggle chances for that day to lie in his own quarters, he must concentrate on *that!*

It was so to-day. Fortunately the Crale forwards, stung by Bunt's angry indignation, were playing now with some effect and were getting the ball with

frequency. Instantly through Jeremy's young body there passed the sacred glow! His thought now was only for Steevens and Steevens's only for him! He was playing with a ferocious cool-headedness that was the mark of his game at its best. He was on to the ball like a dog on a rabbit; his hands were sure and safe, his passes swift as lightning and hard and true. He felt no pains in his body; he was not conscious of his body at all. He was down to every rush, had the ball up from the very feet of the Raddan forwards, and, over all, had the glorious knowledge that Steevens was always with him, knowing what he would do before he was himself aware of it.

The complexion of the game was changed. The forwards had been instructed at half-time that, as the three-quarters were so weak, they were to run the ball themselves, and run it they did.

There came a glorious moment when Jeremy had the ball like an arrow to Steevens and Steevens, swerving, feinting, was through the Raddan forwards and (they were in the Raddan twenty-five) himself was over the line.

He kicked the goal. Five points to eight.

After that Jeremy and Steevens had it all their own way. They did what they liked. Steevens was for the first time on Crale's behalf the inspired genius that Crale afterwards was so magnificently to recognize.

Even the Crale three-quarters, during the final ten minutes of the game, woke up and achieved a run or two. At the blow of the whistle Crale were victors by eighteen points to eight.

4

The Raddan men were sportsmen. They were disappointed but chivalrous, and they had seen some great half-back play which they would not easily forget.

Bunt, orating his own men as they changed, bathed blissfully in the waters of his own enthusiasm.

Steevens was a revelation to him—yes, a revelation. In all his years at Crale he could not remember a better stand-off half. And Jeremy came in for his share: "You're a pair! Wonderful combination! You played like a young tiger, that last quarter of an hour, Cole. Yes, upon my soul—never seen anything better." Bunt was at his best now, genuine, self-forgetting, fired with the ardour and rigour of the game.

Yes, that was a good hour. The shower, the change, tea in the School Hall with speeches and cheers and great enthusiasm, and behind it all, the knowledge that the thing had come off, that a combination had been formed that might lead to great deeds, and that his chances for the First were now rich and royal!

But none of this approached the luxurious memory of that last half hour of play. *There* was the purpose and aim of life! That perfect co-ordination of thought and effort, that current of vigour that swept you forward beyond your own weak volition. Not that he thought of it like this. He only knew that it had been a perfect half hour, never to be lost or forgotten.

Steevens, of course, was the hero of the day,

but that was pleasant, too, because Steevens took it all so decently with such quiet indifference, listening to Bunt patiently but with no elation, drinking his tea, saying but little.

Only once to Jeremy, "Good work, if they go on playing us together."

To which Jeremy answered:

"Rather!"

And then climbing into the wagonette again. It was dark, dark with a tumbling silver shadow of stars. The air was cold like a friendly slap in the face, sharp and lovely about your head as the wagonette moved off through the trees and started down the hill.

Oh, yes, Jeremy was happy indeed, and squashed between Bunt and Merriman they clattered through the stars. He'd like Uncle Samuel to know that he'd played well. He'd like to have the ball in his hands at this minute, to feel himself snatch it from whirling boots, to feel the rigour of the straight hard sting, to see Steevens catch it with that marvellous precision, one movement of arms and body and legs, the knowing instinctively what to do. . . . Oh, he was a player, that chap Steevens. . . . Jeremy licked his lips over him. Bunt was rambling on over any old thing. How black the hedges as they ran to meet you, smelling of leaves and rain, how faint the light upon the road, how bright the air against your cheek! How squeezed, too, his body, aching a bit from sundry blows and kicks, between that ass Bunt and Podgy Merriman. He sniffed with his nose like a little dog.

Then someone began to sing :

Mr. John he was a gentleman,
A gentleman, a gentleman ;
Mr. John he was a gentleman,
And so say all of us !

He hunted in the morning
When all the cocks were crowing,
He found the Fox at evening,
So wise he was and *knowing*.
Mr. John he was a gentleman,
And so say all of us !

So fat he was and cheery,
So red of face and *Beery*,
A gentleman at sight !
We hope he'll live for ever,
And meet disaster never,
And so say all of us !

(And now together !)

Mr. John he was a gentleman,
A gentleman, a gentleman ;
Mr. John he was a gentleman,
And so say all of us !

Jeremy, singing with full throat, marking the time, all unwittingly, on Bunt's stout thigh, thus saluted his perfect hour !

CHAPTER VII

THE WAR OF THE SHEEP AND THE GOATS (II)

THE FEAST

I

THE term was now well on its way and Jeremy's life was rich and varied. A small boy at a public school may be said never to think, it being the deliberate purpose of his elders and betters to keep him out of mischief by drugging his brain with physical occupation. But Jeremy was not entirely the ordinary small boy; there was something in him, deep down, lying like a fish at the sandy bottom of a deep pool, and this fish, ever and anon, flapped its tail, opened its mouth to swallow an insect, and in one way and another showed activity.

Moreover, do what he would, he had a questioning mind. He would have preferred to be lazy, to be occupied only by his body, but other things, more uncertain and undefined things, would keep breaking in.

Certain things were, however, definite. One was that the match against Raddan had done him fine profit. In fact, the danger now was that enthusiasm would go too far. People would expect

great brilliance, and—after all, the Raddan team had not been difficult to beat. In any case, Cole and Steevens were down as the first halves for the next School Match—a game against a local football club.

Oddly, in this matter, Jeremy's chief desire was to know whether that fellow Ridley was aware of his success. Here he stayed for no self-analysis. He did not ask himself why this boy, to whom he had never spoken, about whom he knew nothing, was more important to him than any other boy in the school. He saw him every morning at Chapel and that was the only time in the day when he did see him. Ridley sat with the Sixth in the far section near the choir, and Jeremy could see him quite clearly from his own place in the middle of the building.

His further inspection of him confirmed all his first hero-worship, but he could not have told you why. It was partly, perhaps, Ridley's reserve and dignity. He "walked by himself," but he never seemed lonely or conceited. He was austere, but not superior. He had assuredly all the virtues that Jeremy himself had not. Although he was slim and pale, he seemed strong and athletic, but Jeremy felt a little ashamed of his own enthusiasm for games when he looked at him. Ridley had plainly matters of far greater importance to consider.

Nevertheless, it did not appear that he would patronize you if you spoke to him.

As he walked up Chapel with the rest of the Sixth, after the remainder of the school were seated, he seemed to Jeremy to have more friendly dignity

than any other boy there. He looked " an awfully decent chap," and that was the whole of it.

Jeremy had already set him up in his mind as a judge of right conduct. What would Ridley think of this ? What would Ridley think of that ? And, strange though it may sound, it was nevertheless true that this boy, to whom he had never yet spoken, was influencing him more strongly in the queer transition stage through which he was now passing from child to adolescent than any other—save possibly Uncle Samuel—in all the world.

Another business of disturbing importance was the quarrel with Staire. What a foolish and tiresome matter this had become ; and because it was foolish and tiresome, his dislike of Staire was, against his own wishes, aggravated. He did not want to dislike anyone—always for him a waste of time and temper ; but he " wasn't going to stand " Staire's irritations, and if Staire wanted a row he should have one.

It was obvious enough that Staire wanted one, or if not himself, at least his followers. Moreover, this new football success of young Cole's did not exactly delight Staire's heart. It was difficult for any boy as proud and as determined on leadership as was Staire to pass from the prominence of the cricket team to the insignificance of the football one. He hated it that he did not play football well, he who would lead at everything.

He felt himself so superior to Stocky Cole that he could scarcely be said to dislike him, but it was intensely aggravating that everyone else did not

also feel his superiority as a natural and obvious thing. But he was not at present, at least, as actively concerned in the feud as were his immediate followers, Crumb, Baldock and the others; and Baldock and the rest he despised quite as thoroughly as he did Cole.

Meanwhile, underground the tide swelled. Every sort of tiny grudge, accident, joke, was drawn into the main current. And the small boys buzzed like flies.

However fervently Jeremy might wish to keep out of it, he could not. Word came to him that Baldock and Crumb were carrying on a fine bullying campaign among the infants. That was not his business, that was the affair of the house-prefects; nevertheless, the good work was being carried on both in his name and Staire's, and the day might come when he himself would be held responsible—and, indeed, that day *was* to come. . . .

Altogether, unknown to himself, his dislike of Staire was every day increasing. He began to want "to have it out with him." They never spoke to one another now and it roused all his combative obstinacy when Staire passed him, head in air, scornful, mocking, murmuring to a chosen friend some sarcastic joke. Oddly, too, Jeremy felt himself, when Staire was there, to be something of that country clodhopper that Staire claimed him to be. Yes, he'd like to bash the fellow's face in! He would, some day.

2

More profitable than this irritating feud was his increasing friendship with Parlow. He was ashamed, in a way, to take advantage of Parlow's preference; it seemed a sneaky kind of thing to be let off when you ought to be punished, and, without being in the least priggish about it, he hated that Parlow should be unfair, simply because he was beginning to like Parlow so much.

After the game at Raddan he came right to the front in Parlow's favour. Parlow was always proud of his form and it pleased him greatly when any member of it won distinction.

But Jeremy was also exactly the kind of boy that he liked, the kind of boy that he understood. He saw very quickly that young Cole had an instinctive care for beautiful things; that although he was clumsy in self-expression, shy of emotion, sensitive to "being different," afraid above all of any "soppiness" or sentimentality, his nature was the artist's, whether for good or ill.

One afternoon he read to his class part of Arnold's "Balder Dead," the description of the funeral ship standing out to sea, the lines that begin with:

> But when the gods and Heroes heard, they brought
> The wood to Balder's ship, and built a pile,
> Full the deck's breadth, and lofty: then the Corpse
> Of Balder on the highest top they laid. . . .

He was himself carried away by the splendid lines, and read on, forgetting the boys, lost in his own dreams, living his own secret life. Looking up at

last he saw Jeremy, his mouth open, staring into that other world where his own steps were at that moment treading. And in that instant he knew one of the joys that lighten once and again the schoolmaster's pilgrimage. It was characteristic of him that five minutes later he should be raging at Standing, his body trembling with passion and that wretched boy shaking in front of him.

No boy in the form grudged Jeremy his luck. Parlow was certain to have his favourites, and it was better that it should be young Cole, who played football decently, than some rotter who didn't know one end of a game from another. So was character estimated in the Middle Fourth!

3

The match against the local team took place and the school won with ease. Steevens played brilliantly and was the hero of the occasion; Jeremy did nothing especial and made one rather bad blunder. Steevens was safe for his colours, and his rise had been as spectacular as anyone remembered; Jeremy was not only not safe but in the match against Ulverstone, for the succeeding week, some one else was chosen instead of him.

The only pleasant thing that came out of this was Steevens's indignation. "They don't know a blessed thing about it," he said to Jeremy. "You and I are made for one another, and you know it as well as I; but how are we ever going to settle down unless they play us together a bit? We will make the best school halves in the kingdom in a season.

It's dead certain. Meanwhile, just because you hadn't a chance of showing off the other day they spoil the whole thing. I can't say anything yet, I'm too new. But you wait."

This was a long speech for Steevens and very agreeable. It was delivered quite impersonally. Jeremy might have been a useful piece of garden produce for any human quality he had for Steevens, but it was all the more sincere and honest for that.

Steevens might not have charm, but most certainly he was honest. He never took the trouble to be otherwise. But this dropping from the team made Jeremy rather reckless. He was not so foolish as to cherish the grudge of the neglected genius, but, supported by Steevens's opinion, he did feel that he had been too hastily dropped, and his wilder Robin Hood personality (so far, kept under this term) poked up its green-bonneted head.

And as Providence is for ever on the watch for the critical moment, so now it happened that there arrived a letter from Uncle Percy and in the letter, marvel of all marvels, was a cheque for five pounds!

Now the story of Jeremy and his Uncle Percy has been told in another place. It is enough to say here that Uncle Percy was a Colonial uncle, that he had, in Jeremy's life-time, paid only one visit to his fond relatives in Polchester, and after that visit (a very memorable one) he had returned to his Colonies. Jeremy had not cared for this uncle and had, in consequence of certain unfortunate circumstances, made this plain. He had even refused a tip. This refusal had, it seemed, rankled in Uncle Percy's heart and, although it was long

ago, this letter and this beneficent present were a peace-offering.

It had all been so long ago, indeed, that Jeremy knew nothing but kind feelings towards his poor uncle; moreover, he had, by this time, learnt more efficiently the value of money.

This was indeed a wonderful present, and yet not quite so wonderful as it looked, because the cheque must be taken to Paddy Leeson and four out of the five pounds would be confiscated and added, in minute sums, to the weekly pocket-money. But one pound remained—one pound with which Jeremy might do exactly what he pleased.

His natural tendency was always to give away everything that he possessed. He had, in fact, almost a mania in that direction. This was no virtue in him but part of his own tendency to be most happy when those around him were jolly. Moreover, possessions checked his sense of freedom. All his life it was to be so.

There was, therefore, one obvious thing to be done with this pound—namely, to have a Feast.

The Feasts in those disorderly days at Crale were functions of a great ceremony and an abiding splendour. I fear that in these regenerate times of superior education they have been put down. I can only say that I am extremely sorry. They were, in the first place, historic and went back without break for many hundreds of years. In the second place, they fostered the generous instincts in a boy's soul. In the third place, although they were, of course, against authority, they were also in a

kind of way acknowledged and admitted, and so provided a very pretty picture of English public-school traditional morality.

They were dormitory Feasts, and they were against authority in that if they were, by bad chance, publicly discovered, they were publicly punished. They were acknowledged and admitted in that the giver of the Feast always asked of the Dormitory Prefect permission and sanction, which, if there had not been in that particular dormitory for some long period a Feast, was always granted. Then, on the night in question, the Dormitory Prefect, secure in his cubicle, hid his ears under the bed-clothes and so slept the sleep of the just and humanitarian philosopher.

Now Jeremy's dormitory had not held a Feast for a very long time, those who were wealthy enough not being generous enough and those who were generous enough being, alas, not wealthy enough.

During any other time Jeremy would not have hesitated for a single instant, but now, at this so important moment in his career, he hesitated. About every Feast there was always the glorious possibility of a row. Did not that possibility add salt of the finest to the savour of the Feast? On this particular night Paddy Leeson might take it into his inquiring mind to make his particular discovery. One could never tell how that queer thing, a master's brain, would work.

Any public scandal just now and Jeremy was a ruined man. He realized this quite clearly. He discussed the question with Jumbo and, in dis-

cussing it, discovered to his surprise that all was not well between Jumbo and himself.

His friendship with Jumbo had pursued always the smoothest courses; that had been one of its most pertinent charms. Jumbo had never known, apparently, what personal claims, personal hurts, personal grievances meant. He had ever followed when Jeremy's stronger determination led him.

But now, quite suddenly, there was a difference.

Jeremy had begun, as they walked about Coulter's, by explaining his difficulties. Like many a dominating friend, he had spoken as though there were but one interesting topic in the world and that the one in which his companion must be absorbed as was he himself. Then he realized that Jumbo's excitement over the Feast question was very slight indeed. Of course Jumbo was not in his dormitory, but surely he could not be so selfish. . . .

"What's up?" he asked.

"Nothing. Why?" asked Jumbo, kicking the gravel.

"You're sick about something."

"No, I'm not."

"Yes, you are."

"I'm not sick"—Jumbo raised his odd moon-face countenance and plunged on clumsily into the so rarely visited jungle of his feelings; "it's only that you're changed, Stocky. It's this term. Since you've had a study and played for the First. . . . Oh, you're all right. It would be natural for you to be swanky, but you're not, at least not more than anybody would be. . . . But you don't

want me as you did. You don't want me to share in everything; you're getting more important and I'm not. And, what's more, I never will be. I'm not the sort of fellow who will ever be important in anything. We don't think the same way about things. Last term you'd have been keen as anything on the rag with Staire. Now you seem to want to get out of it. I'm not the sort of friend you want any more, and I'd rather not be with you at all than know all the time I'm not wanted."

Jumbo breathed deeply. This was a tremendous effort for him. He had never in all his life before, perhaps, made such an effort.

Jeremy was ashamed and confused. He put his arm round Jumbo's neck and protested most earnestly. But in his heart he knew that what Jumbo said was true. It had not occurred to him until now, but—yes, it was true. A number of things, Paddy's talk with him; Parlow's interest in him; this row with Staire, in which he found no fun, but only irritation; and, above all, his thoughts about Ridley, these things had, without his knowing it, carried him forward. There was something static about Jumbo; he was faithful and true, but he was also closed to all development and would always be.

Jeremy was face to face for the first time with that tangled question of loyalty in friendship—loyalty which, because of old times, must be supported, but loyalty, too, in something from which the heart is gone.

Jumbo was apparently reassured, but as he went off down the field Jeremy felt an uneasy and self-

critical discomfort. Everything was changing, and not by his own wish ; and yet, in the change, there was excitement, too.

4

And so, to prove to himself, if to nobody else, that he was the same Jeremy who loved rags and rows and rebellions, he decided on the Feast.

He appointed a Committee of Supplies, too, in addition to himself.

The broad division of expenditure was as follows :

	£	s.	d.
Potted Meat		5	0
Sardines		5	0
Doughnuts, etc.		3	0
Chocolates, etc.		3	0
Marmalade (Large Pot)		3	6
Biscuits		3	0
Sausage-Rolls		2	0
	£1	4	6

Now the dormitory contained twelve boys, but of these the two new boys were appointed scouts. They did not share in the Feast, but were awarded sweets and biscuits if they did well. Of the remaining ten, two were in the Infirmary with colds and that left eight, and of these eight one, Scholdz, a Jew, was "barred" and would not be invited. Scholdz was "barred" not so much because he was a Jew as that he was a worm, a sneak, a dirty skunk, a "scat"; and he was all these things because in his first term he had gone to Leeson

and complained of the bullying. Better for him, as he now very thoroughly knew, had he suffered himself to be crucified in stern silence. And now a year of scorn and ostracism had reduced his soul to a fine state of crawling and subsequent sycophancy.

There were, then, only seven for the Feast—the prospects were good.

The next step was to approach Malleson, the Dormitory Prefect. Malleson, who was a thin, lazy, dreamy boy, with a soul sunk in chemistry, was not a difficult subject.

Jeremy met him coming up from Chapel. "I say, Malleson——"

"Yes?"

"We want to have a Feast on Saturday night. Can we?"

"No, you can't!"

"Oh, I say——"

"What were you saying?"

Jeremy began patiently again:

"We want to have a Feast on Saturday night. Can we?"

"Oh, a Feast. . . ." Malleson stopped, gazing dreamily across the fields. "What do you want a Feast for?"

"My uncle sent me some money. We haven't had one for ever so long."

"Haven't you? . . . Oh, well, I suppose, if you want to make pigs of yourselves."

That was enough. Rumbling out, "Oh, thanks awfully," Jeremy ran off. It was risky with a chap like Malleson. He would be sure to forget

and suddenly appear in the middle of it and ask what all the row was about. No matter, Jeremy would remind him again.

Each member of the Committee would buy a third of the provisions, that no suspicions might be aroused in the minds of the authorities. They were not purchased until the afternoon of the day.

One detail remained. It was the tradition that at the Feast there should be a Story-Teller who, as in the palaces of Arabian potentates, should narrate thrilling events while the sardines, marmalade and sausage-rolls were enthusiastically enjoyed. The Story-Teller's job was no light one, because he was compelled to be thrilling in a whisper. Compelled also to continue until everyone present was satiated. Often a new boy was chosen for this, but new boys—shivering with cold and nervous fears—were poor Story-Tellers. Jeremy had a brilliant notion. He would see whether Marlowe, who, being a writer of romances must, *ipso facto*, be also a narrator of them, would not honour them.

It was a delicate matter, because Marlowe belonged to another dormitory, and any boy caught out of his own dormitory was punished terribly. But Marlowe's author's vanity was, as Jeremy knew, his weakness. Jeremy approached him with great tact. He spoke of Marlowe's genius, the necessity that it should be more widely known and the especial quality of the sardines and the doughnuts.

Marlowe, who was greedy as well as vain, succumbed.

They went to bed on Saturday night, their nightshirts over their shirts and trousers. Long after

Malleson (who had been properly reminded by Jeremy) had gone his rounds and all the House were sleeping, Marlowe, a shivering figure, appeared like a ghost at Jeremy's bed. Without a word, without a sound, the seven uprose. The Dormouse and the other new boy were dispatched by signs to the door to be on guard and then—happiness beyond happiness—on Jeremy's bed were spread the already open tins of glistening, oily sardines snuggled close together, waiting their willing sacrifice; the great, white pot of amber-coloured, smooth-faced marmalade; the sausage-rolls, so coyly hiding their fragments of fragrance-bearing sausage; the biscuits on a plate, the ones with pink sugar a-top; the doughnuts, so soft and yielding to the touch, so amiable in shape, so deceptive in content; and, last and worthiest of all, the thick bars of chocolate-cream, the slabs of resisting Devona, the luxurious, crunching, slippery solidity of the immortal bull's-eye. . . .

The seven huddled round the bed, their noses twitching, their eyes glistening, their young stomachs crying aloud. Delicious the secrecy, the silence, the thud and rhythm of the sea, the snores of Malleson, the smell of the pastry, the anxiety and conspirator-brotherhood, and defiance of authority.

Only Jeremy was uneasy. He was aware that in the bed almost opposite young Scholdz was huddled, his bright black eyes closed, pretending, in fine superiority to be sleeping, but in actual fact conscious of every sound, bitterly unhappy because of his ostracism, his isolation—and his hunger.

He did not want to think of Scholdz. Why should

he ? Levi meant nothing to him. But, no—he could not conquer his uneasiness. He slipped off the bed and, on naked feet, crossed the floor. He shook Scholdz's shoulder.

" You can come if you like," he said. Scholdz, without a word, his little black head gleaming in the moonlight, was out of bed and had joined the others. They did not care. It was Stocky's Feast. They made way for Scholdz, and he was handed half a sardine on a Petit-Beurre biscuit.

Then, in a trembling, sinister whisper, Marlowe began :

" Once upon a time, in the time of Charles I, a lonely horseman could be seen spurring across the plain on a dark and stormy night, when the wind was fearful and he could not see a step of the way, but trusted to his good horse. . . ."

5

The Dormouse was achieving that ambition granted to Napoleon, Nelson and one or two more heroes—he was sleeping standing. He was so bitterly chilly that in his dream he climbed an insurmountable iceberg upon whose slippery sides he rose and fell. He was always so weary now that if left alone for a moment, he fell asleep at once, thereby justifying completely his nickname.

The other boy on guard had turned away from watching the passage, as was his true and proper duty, and was gazing hungrily in the direction of the feasters, straining his ears for the story-teller's whispered tale, wondering whether there would be

any cakes and ale for himself before the night was over. Poor, besotted guards! They did not see the white, ghostly figures stealing up the passage, did not hear the thin patter of the naked feet, knew nothing until they were caught from behind and hands were over their mouths.

The Dormouse sharply waking, realizing that the enemy were upon him, struggled fiercely. He had fallen asleep at his post and betrayed Cole's trust. This was the first thing that Cole had asked him to do for him, and he had failed. His pride had been immense when Jeremy had explained what he must do; he had had no thought of the Feast or of possible biscuits; this was the fulfilling of the desire of his heart, that Cole should ask some duty from him—and now he had failed!

His struggles were vain. One raider held him back against the wall, another pressed his hand over his mouth. The treatment was rough.

Marlowe had reached the first crisis of his narrative—"At that moment a mounted rider in a black mask barred the road. 'Stand or I fire,' he challenged"—when he felt himself swung off the bed and a moment later was grappling with some silent enemy on the floor.

There was taking place on all sides of him warfare as quiet as the grave.

The raiders—needless to say that it was Staire's party, headed by Crumb and Baldock—numbered at least a dozen, but Jeremy and his noble seven fought gloriously and little black-headed Scholdz was among the noblest. The Goats were armed each with a pillow, a hairbrush and a wet sponge.

It may be fancied by the uninitiated that a pillow-fight involves noise. That is not so when the pillows are used as shields rather than weapons of defence. In one thing Jeremy and his Sheep held advantage—under their night-shirts they wore shirts and trousers. The Goats had their night-shirts for their only covering.

Jeremy, aided by two friends, had the infinite satisfaction of muffling Crumb's head in his night-shirt, holding him down on the bed with his hair in a sardine-tin, and crimsoning his bare behind with hairbrushes. This, too, may be done quietly and yet efficiently by the artist in this kind.

But the attention paid to Crumb meant that there were but few Sheep left to defend the fort, or rather the Feast, and this, the Feast, was, of course, the objective of the Goats.

Turning from Crumb, Jeremy saw the sardines, the marmalade, the biscuits, the chocolates vanishing down the Dormitory. One desperate effort and he caught Baldock by the tail of his shirt, fell upon his neck, and the two came crashing to the ground. The noise was as of a thunder-clap on a fair sea. The Sheep stood paralysed. The Goats (and the Feast with them) vanished. Surely the whole House must be awake! But Nature restored her beneficial sway; the moon shone on, the clamp-clamp of the sea crept in once again through the open windows, Malleson's friendly snore ran through the room unchecked.

No sign of a Goat. No sign of a Feast. Only a disordered bed and on the floor the white, mute tail of a night-shirt.

Jeremy was defeated. This was an insult that nothing short of blood (and a lot of it) could modify.

A small figure with bent head crept to his bed. Jeremy caught him by the shoulder.

"You're a nice guard!" he whispered fiercely. "Why didn't you cry 'Cave,' you young fool?"

The Dormouse said nothing. No one said anything.

The moonlight, the sea, the snore, all three aloof, Olympian, indifferent, held the scene.

And Jeremy's heart was sore. And the Dormouse's heart was sorer.

CHAPTER VIII

INTERLUDE: IN PARLOW'S ROOMS

THIS raid on the Feast proved deeply humiliating to Jeremy and his supporters. He didn't want to have supporters; he didn't want to have a feud; but, by jove, if Staire and his gang were going to play dirty tricks like this . . . !

Nor did the Goats make little of their achievement. They had won a notable triumph. The story grew with the telling; the Feast (as afterwards enjoyed by the Goats) became Gargantuan, young Stocky's impotence pitiful. Staire pretended that he was outside it entirely—that he had known nothing of it—that it had been a game for "kids," too immature for his notice, and so, once again, raised himself high over Jeremy's head.

Yes, Jeremy was beginning to hate him very much indeed.

And, as is always the way, one ripple spread to another. The ground upon which we tread is subject to strange oscillating movements, so that at one moment everyone seems to be sliding towards us, at another away from us. Jeremy was aware that he was in danger of a rather curious loneliness. There was trouble between himself

and Jumbo. Unlike the infants in M. Gide's "Faux Monnayeurs," he was not given at all to self-analysis and he did not sit down and consider what exactly was wrong with Jumbo and himself. But their easy moment-by-moment intimacy was broken. Jumbo had clumsily explained, and Jeremy had known, that there was justice in the explanation; but because that little conversation had been awkward and embarrassing, both boys were determined that there should not be another, pretended that things were as they had been, and so knew the more conclusively that they were not.

Then there was trouble with Gauntlet, and trouble with Marlowe. It was very unpleasant to have rows with fellows in your own Study. Study space was confined; you sat, as it were, on top of one another and were for ever meeting. The row with Gauntlet was especially difficult because Gauntlet was such a diplomat. You never knew of what he was thinking. In that little battle of words Gauntlet had, in a moment of, for him, extraordinary rashness, said just what he thought, and he now resented that indiscretion deeply. Jeremy was certain that he had definitely gone over into Staire's camp, but he would not say so, and the effect of it was as though you had a spy in your own household. If there was one thing that Jeremy loathed, it was deceit—pretending to be what you were not. He could not definitely charge Gauntlet with this, because beneath his politeness and amiability he showed quite clearly his hostility, but you could not catch him; fish-like he was for ever slipping from your hand.

He told Staire everything, of course—everything that Jeremy said and did. One day Jeremy would have a "scrap" with him. It seemed to be the only way of clearing the situation.

And then there was Marlowe. Marlowe's literary dignity had been hurt by the unfortunate ending to the Feast. He seemed to have taken that invitation very seriously. It had been the first step towards public recognition of his genius, and he blamed Jeremy for its ignominious close. His face wore always now a grieved expression, and Jeremy longed to kick him.

Then disorder was gathering daily in the Lower School section of the House, and in some vague, undecided fashion Jeremy appeared to be responsible for this. Baldock and Crumb were governing the Locker-Room with a kind of Spanish Inquisition and making young Cole's cheek the reason for this. The House Prefects were not, this term, a very strong body, and, as was often the case at the beginning of a new year, were shy at asserting too definitely their authority. It would soon come to it that Jeremy himself must descend into these Infernal Regions and see what he could do about it, but that would mean a series of ignominious scuffles, the very things that he wished at this moment to avoid.

Then floated up to him, from time to time, the name of the Dormouse, as of someone especially persecuted. He realized the boy, his white face, frightened eyes, tousled hair, and was vaguely irritated. *He* wasn't the infant's keeper—the days of Tom Brown and young Arthur were gone for

ever ; but he was uncomfortable and knew that he was.

Although all day he was busy, and merry, and noisy, and in the midst of companions, yet he was beginning to be lonely and dissatisfied. Something was wrong and he did not know quite what it was.

Then, happy event, there was a letter from Uncle Samuel. It had always been one of the world's wonders that Uncle Samuel always seemed to know when he was wanted, seemed to know, too, just the way that Jeremy was feeling. Uncanny ! But Uncle Samuel was a marvellous man, the most marvellous the world contained.

This was the letter :

I suppose you're all set up about your football. That's all right so long as you don't think football the only thing in the world. Because it isn't : there are also Lobster Mayonnaise, Forain etchings, a pianoforte Sonata by Brahms in F Minor, pictures by your uncle, the rocks beyond Sennen, your mother's unselfishness, your uncle's superiority to snobs, the novels of Stendhal, and a journey to China if you've got the cash (which I haven't). However, I don't expect you to realize these things yet. I would only urge you to keep a window open and let in plenty of air. Don't get stuffy over your football. You won't be able to play it for ever, you know, and games desert you even more basely than women.

An old friend's been staying with me here, these last few days, M. Honoré Balzac. If your father knew he wouldn't be at all pleased. He isn't the sort of guest he'd like to have in the house, but whenever I hear your father coming I get him to hide in the cupboard (you know—the one with the skeleton), which can't be pleasant for him because he's very large and fat and anything but good-natured. However, he's like all egoists, will submit

to anything for an audience and, although you mightn't think it, I'm a very good one. He talks ceaselessly and loves piling on the details. However, he really has known some remarkable people and just now he's full of a young man (Christian name Lucien, surname Rubempré) who went up to Paris from the country with no morals and great ambitions and thought he was going to turn the world upside down.

He did, in fact, go a long way, but lost his head, couldn't find it again and came to a bad end. I shouldn't like you to do that over your football. Balzac doesn't like my pictures any more than you do, but I don't think he knows much about Art. Finance is his line and he's put me up to some mighty fine wheezes in that direction. But he says that I haven't got a financial brain, in which I'm sure he's quite correct. Your letters this term are not so simple as hitherto they've been. I suppose that, having for three years preferred your requests for food and money and, that done, felt that you'd made everybody happy, you are suddenly aware that there is more in the world than your all-demanding stomach. I suppose having a Study has made you feel important and, feeling important, you begin to realize the school and its affairs. Well, that's not a bad thing. I hate to belong to any kind of body of people myself, and so ultimately will you, but it won't do you any harm to realize for a while that every movement that you make affects someone else—starts the ripples rolling. Only don't be self-conscious about it and think that you matter. But I don't believe you will. I've written this far and stop to consider. I've no doubt that what I've just said is quite false. Take myself. Here I've been sponging on your family for the Lord knows how many years and simply haven't affected them in the tiniest degree. Not a little atom. They all think exactly as they did before I came to them. I haven't opened their eyes to one single beautiful thing. I haven't made your father face life with any more courage, nor your mother understand a single picture nor one line of real poetry.

Nor have they altered me. I haven't acquired one scrap of your father's fine moral character, his devotion to what he thinks right, his hatred of what he knows to be wrong. I don't know what *is* wrong. I never did. I know what is fine and courageous and unselfish, though. I can't do fine and courageous things, but I take my hat off to them when I see them. Nor has your mother made me a bit more unselfish by the splendour of her noble example. I see her thinking of others all day long and think of myself all the more.

So we don't affect one another after all—or perhaps we only affect those that are of our own family. Gauguin—I'll tell you about him one day—and Marie Lloyd and Hiroshize . . . a nice family ours and worth leaving a card on.

Here; don't you listen to all this. Play your football and make yourself sick with sardines and marmalade. All the same, keep your eyes skinned and when you see the clouds like silver dragons gaping open-mouthed for the red ball of a sun to swallow, when you see a green wave break on a black rock, when the waters run down a hill after rain,

Remember Your Loving
Old Uncle.

2

The effect of this letter of Uncle Samuel's was immediately increased by a strange and rather dramatic incident. After morning school, as he was leaving the class-room, Jeremy felt a hand on his shoulder and, turning, saw Parlow towering over him.

"Come into tea this afternoon," he said.

"Thank you, sir," said Jeremy. That was what he had wanted and had, if the truth be told, been

rather expecting. Parlow's teas were famous, not only because he gave you plenty to eat, but also because he showed you treasures. Chaps affected to despise Parlow's collections, his books and pictures and precious things, but they spoke of them, nevertheless, and in spite of themselves, with awe and wonder. Parlow was the only master in the whole school who had such things, and even if it were only for the money they must have cost they were interesting. Had Parlow not been himself so hefty a human being, with an outrageous temper and a lover of games, he would have been despised for caring for beautiful things; as it was, his freakishness was permitted.

But, beyond this, Jeremy had by now acquired a great admiration for him and wanted terribly his good esteem. Apparently he had won it, more thoroughly indeed than any boy just now in the class, but this invitation laid the seal upon it and it made him very happy.

Normally, he would have hurried now to tell Jumbo, but, in fact, he did not. Jumbo would pretend to be interested when, in reality, he was not. There were many occasions now when Jeremy was on the edge of rushing to Jumbo, kicking him fraternally and having it all out with him; but something always held him back, and that something, although he did not know it, was that he had himself, entirely in spite of himself, changed about Jumbo. He was acquiring a new bundle of interests, interests that weren't Jumbo's. He wished he wasn't. But how could he help it?

Then, going slowly into Leeson's on the way to

his Study, something further occurred. The passage was dark and, moving rather blindly along, he encountered another body, nearly fell over it, caught it by its collar to save himself and discovered that it was the Dormouse.

"Sorry," he said.

His hand was still on the Dormouse's shoulder and this led him to discover that the boy was trembling all over.

"Hullo!" he said. "What are you in such a funk about? I'm not going to kill you."

Becoming then more accustomed to the half light he saw that the Dormouse was in a very dirty condition of ink, dust and disorder. The boy looked at him like a frightened rabbit.

"What are you in a funk about?" he asked him.

"Nothing," said the Dormouse.

"Yes, you are. Of course you are. Has anybody been hacking you?"

"No," said the Dormouse.

"Oh, well——" He moved away and then came back.

"Look here, if anyone rags you, come and tell me. It won't be sneaking. I won't let on to anyone—but I'll see they don't do it again. Who goes for you mostly? Baldock?"

"No," said the Dormouse, his mouth trembling.

"Crumb, then?"

"No," said the Dormouse.

"Oh, well, if you won't tell me, you won't." He paused awkwardly. "Look here, show them you don't mind. Everyone has to go through it

at first. I did myself. If they see you don't like it, they'll go on with it."

The Dormouse said nothing.

"Will you come and tell me if they don't leave you alone?"

"Yes," the Dormouse said.

Jeremy went on to the Study vaguely uncomfortable and disturbed. He *would* have to go down to that Locker-Room and see what was happening, and then be mixed up in every kind of row! But why did he care? A term ago he wouldn't have minded. It seemed now that it was in some way his own fault.

Five minutes later he had forgotten it all. Everything was suddenly jolly. He and Gauntlet were, all in a moment, as they used to be, forgetting grudges, suspicions, accusations, inviting Ball and Hindlip into tea (Hindlip was the fattest boy in Leeson's and known as "The Tub"); then making toast, digging a thin spoon that bent at the waist deep (oh, very deep indeed) into the blackberry-jam pot, bringing it out with the handle sticky and licking the jam off the handle; talking about everything five-hundred to the dozen and never listening to anybody; the room growing fuggier and fuggier; scraping the bottom of the condensed milk tin to obtain from it the very last sticky remnant; suddenly ragging "The Tub," turning him over and sitting on his so largely protuberant places; hearing beyond the warm, rich, intimate luxury of the little room the general life and buzz of the school, the pianos jangling, the voices discordantly singing, the Prefects yelling for fags, the boots thumping down

the passage; and knowing that everywhere—in the hive of every House—this tumult was so happily, with such jollity and freedom and energy, spreading itself up and down, in and out, under and over. . . . Jeremy was, of course, not outwardly conscious of this, but, balancing back in his chair on its two very uncertain legs, he was, at the top of his voice with Gauntlet and Hindlip and Ball, singing this glorious song:

And so the old man had a
Tum, Tum, Tum;
And his voice it was jolly well
Dumb, Dumb, Dumb;
Till they turned him about on his
Bum, Bum, Bum:
And a jolly Good
Thing
Too!

3

The other tea-party was very different. Parlow, although he was a bachelor, had a house all to himself. It was a rather mysterious little house standing in a hollow below the playing fields. It had a wonderful view of the sea, and was guarded on its left side by a thick, bunched and inquisitive wood. Inquisitive because the wind had blown all the trees with their heads towards the house.

Boys in Parlow's form went often enough there with exercises, detention punishment and anticipations of ferocious interviews. Vivid pictures had been drawn for Jeremy of Parlow standing at the end of his long study and shouting at his victims

so that the papers at the other corner of the room stirred and rustled with terror. But, for himself, from the moment that he passed the door and stood in the little cool, white hall with the panelled walls and a large blue bowl smelling of rose-leaves, he was happy. He raised his head, sniffing like a little dog.

And he had never yet, in all his days, seen anything so fascinating as Parlow's study. It was long and full of light, the windows on one side deep and tall, framing an expanse of sea in the day, guarded now by curtains of deep blue, and on the other side the long wall papered with books. Never before had he seen so many books in one place and books that looked, in some mysterious fashion, entrancing. At the far end of the room was a wide, open fire-place and in it a log-fire blazing; in front of the fire a broad, solid table covered with food, and in front of the table, advancing to meet him, Parlow.

Jeremy had a wild hope that perhaps he was going to be alone with Parlow. He felt that he could tell Parlow all sorts of things, almost as he might Uncle Samuel (almost, but not quite). He wasn't shy in the least, but knew that he would be shy if any other boy came. But there was no sign of any other boy. Only marvellous things—on the tables and the book-shelves, an image of green stone, a lion carved out of some flaming red stuff, drawings and paintings, and a Chinese dragon with a bright green, curly tail.

He was turning with an inward chuckle of delight towards the fire, when the door opened and some-one came in. He looked and saw that it was Staire.

For a moment a surge of strange, almost ungovernable rage seized him. He had an impulse—mad, crazy, not at all his own—to walk straight out of the room. The very sight of Staire's neatness, elegance, smartness, the carriage of his head, his easy entrance, made Jeremy feel clumsy, awkward, a clod-hopper.

Was this a plot on Parlow's part ? He must have heard ere this of the feud between them. Was he doing it deliberately because he wished them to be friends ? Well, if he was, he could jolly well recognize his mistake, because friends they would never be, never, never, never !

Or was it a joke of Parlow's because he wanted to see what they would be like together ? It was a shame. All the fun was gone, all the happiness, all the pleasure. He wasn't hungry any more ; he didn't want to talk to Parlow ; he only wanted to get out and away, some place where he couldn't see Staire's sharp, good-looking, hard face ; where he wouldn't feel rough all over and as though he hadn't washed his hands, as though every word that he uttered would be so foolish that Staire would be right to sneer at it.

He felt surging up in him that worst of all his failings—that hard, sulky obstinacy, so that he shut his mouth and set his eyes and loathed the world !

Then his manners saved him. It was Parlow's house and it was very decent of Parlow to ask him and to have such a ripping tea. Parlow didn't know how he and Staire loathed one another. Why should he know ? And even if he did know, it didn't seem to him very important. Two small

boys having a row—no, not important at all. Jeremy had a sense of proportion sufficient to realize this —and yet, after all, how important it was! His whole life now seemed to be hanging round this quarrel with Staire, everything was coming into it. But Parlow didn't know that. Of course he didn't.

They sat down to tea and, I am sorry to say, Jeremy did not behave well. Who has not known those occasions when, unfortunately placed, we determine nevertheless to rise above our conditions? —and so indeed we would have done had not, most perversely, many new hostile elements appeared! "Well, I think I can manage *this*," we say and, teeth set, face our opponent; but the words are scarcely out of our mouth before the enemy's force is doubled against us.

So it was now. Jeremy's resolve to be a perfect little gentleman did not take into account that Staire should be at his most devilish and that Parlow should apparently like him thus. Staire was, physically, at a party exactly right. He knew how to move softly, how to sit down easily, how to manage a cup, a saucer, a piece of bread and butter without alarms *or* excursions, how to listen in just the correct fashion, how to contribute anecdotes of his own without being either forward or familiar. Yes, perfect at a tea-party. The only occasion even happier for him—a sunny afternoon, himself in perfect whiteness stepping out to bat, and the ladies murmuring: "*What* a good-looking boy! I do hope he makes a lot of runs!" Which he very often did.

For some simple people he might seem a trifle

too sophisticated, a thought too ripely mature. But these were the exceptions. Negligible country people. Bucolics.

To-day he scarcely noticed Jeremy, but bent all his arts upon Parlow. He was everything that Jeremy was not. Because Jeremy was made short and thick, sitting down gracefully was no very easy thing for him and his legs were inclined to dangle. Then he had never been a genius at that old game —handling the teacup. To-day there was a fine broad table and no nonsense about it, but Staire sat away from this table, balancing bread-and-butter, bread-and-jam, buns and cakes (for all his elegance he made a very hearty tea) most marvellously on the edge of his saucer.

But, worst of all, was Staire's complete command of the conversation. It was not that he talked very much. He listened exquisitely to Parlow, but the important thing was that he was *with* Parlow in everything that Parlow said. He had, it seemed, been everywhere that Parlow had been, or if he had not actually been there, had studied those very countries so exhaustively that there was really no need for him to go there. About pictures and prints he was a connoisseur. He knew apparently what an etching was and its difference from an engraving. He knew where amber came from and, as to Chinese pottery, whether Tang came before Ming or *vice versa*.

If he didn't actually know these things, he gave the impression that he did, which, as every London hostess is aware, is just as good. The result of this was that Parlow, who, like every collector, loved to

be with someone intelligent to whom he might show his things, chose Staire more and more exclusively as his audience and Jeremy was in danger of being altogether forgotten.

At last Jeremy broke in :

" I've got an uncle who's been in Majorca, too."

Parlow either did not hear him or was too eager to continue his praises of Pollenza and a huge, green wave that he had seen topple in over the crystal sands of San Vincente. Jeremy's remark was unnoticed. A little later Staire said :

" They say that the cathedral at Palma is well worth seeing. I must go there one day, if I have time ; " and Jeremy, crimson in the face, forgetting his manners and all his chivalry, burst in with :

" A fat lot you care about Palma ! "—a truthful but most unfortunate remark.

Parlow hated it. He was enjoying himself. Had he been in someone else's house he might have found Staire a prig or a little self-satisfied, but here in his own place he was enjoying his own things and congratulating himself on a most pleasant afternoon (so often on these occasions boys were tongue-tied and awkward and you longed for them to go !).

He had, indeed, for the moment forgotten young Cole. Now he remembered him and turned to find him angry, red-faced, glaring at Staire as though in another moment he would try to knock him down.

The awkward occasion was passed over. Staire had not, it seemed, heard the remark ; that he had in truth noticed it you could be sure by his increased attention to Parlow, his almost too confidential

implication that he and his host were alike suffering from the boorishness of their unfortunate companion.

And Jeremy was miserable. Now Parlow would hate him. He would never invite him to come by himself and look at the beautiful things. He had ruined the tea-party.

He had. A silence, an awkwardness fell. To the relief of everyone the bell for evening chapel began to ring.

The two boys departed together. Then, without a word to one another, they set off on different paths up the hill to the School.

CHAPTER IX

FLIGHT OF THE DORMOUSE

I

AND now events passed swiftly, or rather one event occurred which was to be one of the principal moving points of Jeremy's life—something that he will remember, with its slightest surrounding circumstance, while consciousness of this world and his journey through it remains.

The centre of this event was the Dormouse. They were approaching now half-term, and the Dormouse had arrived at a kind of dumb lethargy that was worse, in spiritual ways, than his first rebellion.

The worst examples of physical torture had not befallen him. This was partly because, as the weeks passed, he had become a fragment of the general furniture of the term, partly because Baldock, whose special property he was now acknowledged by everyone to be, felt for him a sort of humorous indulgence, and beyond kicking him, pinching him, twisting his arm and occasionally devising games for him (as when he stripped him, put a paper cap on his head and stood him on a form to the jeering

admiration of all the Locker Room), defended him from the assaults of anyone else. Baldock found everything in this jolly world a joke, and the Dormouse was one of the best jokes he knew—so there you were!

Moreover, the Dormouse had now found some sort of clue to his daily life. He passed his days still moving from terror to terror; he was never clean, never private, and with every hour his intelligence was more muddled and confused; but he was not late any more; he did, on the whole, what prefects ordered him to do; and although he passed from imposition to imposition and was always at the bottom of his form, he was allowed to lie there, hiding, without public comment.

His misery was passive and dumb. He did not, any longer, think of it very actively; he did not cry, he complained to nobody. He moved from horrible event to horrible event without a murmur.

On every Sunday afternoon he wrote a letter home in which he said that he was well and very happy and would like one of blackberry jam and two of potted meat. He read the letters from his mother in the school privy, which was the only place where he was alone.

Throughout these weeks he had not yielded about his allegiance to Cole, and most of the actual tormenting that came his way was caused by his obstinacy in this.

Cole was his god, and it was as impossible for him to swerve from this faith and allegiance as for any mediæval tortured fanatic.

His actual daily life was spent among the small

twittering animals who inhabited the cellars in Leeson's handsome mansion.

Crale was, is, and pray God ever will be, a great School, and for its inches it has contributed as much fine feeling, health and vigour to the life of its country as any other institute of training; but thirty years ago there was none of the passion for protecting the very young that modern education boasts of. I am ready to be accused of stupid prejudice when I say that it is open to question whether the present methods of over-coddling the tender plant, now so evident at some of our private schools, produces better results than the rough-and-ready indifference of the old system. But be that as it may, one thing is certain—no one was ever over-coddled at Crale thirty years ago.

The Dormouse made no friends among these small contemporaries of his. That first five minutes in the Locker Room had shaken utterly his confidence in his fellow human beings. He was frightened of them all. He disbelieved in them all—save only in Cole.

A crisis, too, had occurred in his spirit on the night of the Feast. That was the only time when Cole had demanded of him a service, and he had failed in it; moreover, Cole had, to his frightened mind, seemed to hate and despise him when, after the catastrophe, he had rebuked him. He was no good, no good at all for anybody or for anything.

He had sunk so low in his own estimation that it seemed to him impossible that he should sink any lower—and yet one worse thing remained. A certain new boy named Cresson took a fancy to

him. Cresson, minute and insignificant though he was, was a fully developed cad. Small blame to Cresson. He came from a home where everything that was vile and coarse and mean was, day by day and hour by hour, flaunted before his eyes. He knew no better, but that sad truth made him none the lovelier. There was no vulgarity, nor obscenity, nor falsehood, nor mean cowardice that Cresson could not, on occasion, produce. He had lived, almost from the day of his birth, among stable-boys, grossly-minded nursemaids, drunken men and women friends of his father. He corrupted with a sure and certain success nearly every boy of his age and size with whom he came into contact, knowing no other, pursuing his natural and inevitable course.

He did not corrupt the Dormouse, and that was because it takes more, far more, than six weeks of misery and bewilderment to contaminate the honour and noble traditions of such a home-life as the Dormouse had known. But for some reason he attached himself to the Dormouse. He was always there, creeping up to whisper some dirty obscenity, to suggest some small theft or minor cruelty, to twist something decent into something indecent.

And the Dormouse, because he had no friend and no companion, yielded to this companionship. He had at present neither the strength nor the clarity of vision to push anything forcibly away from him. It seemed to him safer, in this world full of terror and alarm, to act passively, to accept everything as it came, and hope that he would not be crushed by it.

But he loathed Cresson, loathed him far more than Baldock ; he escaped from him when he could, but always Cresson seemed to be at his side, and he had no power to resist.

Things were at this stage when the Sheep and Goats warfare awoke to a new vigour. No one knew why. It was due in part, perhaps, to that mist of dullness that begins to creep over the school-life about half-term. The novelties of change and return have worn thin ; the end of Term seems to be ever more and more distant ; something must be done to keep everything alive.

Then young Cole's stock had fallen. He had played now twice for the Second Fifteen, and it seemed definitely probable that he would not this term be tried again for the First. Reports were general that since he had obtained a Study he had put on " side." He was Parlow's " pet." He had been a jolly fellow, ready for any sort of a " rag " ; now he was ready no longer, and when he tried to bring something off, it failed—witness the Feast.

Crumb and Baldock, on the other hand, had been very active on Staire's behalf and had trained a fine healthy band of young warriors to harass everyone who fancied that he supported Cole. The whole of the Locker Room was feeling a sort of ground-swell of restlessness and lawlessness that prophesied events !

The Dormouse felt these earth-tremors and knew that they could not bode well for him. Also, he was sorry that his hero was under a cloud. Why were they not playing him in the First Fifteen ? There was certainly no one so fine in all the school.

It was jealousy, and probably Staire was behind it. To the Dormouse Staire was the Devil with all the Devil's grandeur, mystery and other-worldliness. Very grand. Very wicked. Very powerful.

And then he was sharply made aware that Baldock and Crumb were going to have no nonsense any longer about his partisanship. Baldock, laughing, his arm around the Dormouse as though he loved him, explained things. "You see, Dormouse, I'm very fond of you, aren't I? (Twist of the arm.) And you're very fond of me, aren't you? (Twist of the arm.) So that it would be awfully silly if we didn't think alike, being such friends, wouldn't it? (Pinchings of the thigh.) Now you've had some silly idea in your fat little head that you're going to stick up for Stocky Cole, as though he cared whether you did or not. He doesn't know you exist, hardly, but *I* know because you're my special little dormouse and I'm educating you, aren't I, Dormouse?" (Twisting of the ears and sharp pulling of the hair.)

The pain was acute, but the Dormouse answered never a word. "Now it's almost as though you were being disloyal to me, isn't it? And I'm sure you don't want that. So, if you don't shout, 'Down with Stocky Cole!' here and now—well, you'll see what will happen. Now shout!"

The Dormouse raised his face, which was purple because all the blood had run into it, his head hanging over Baldock's leg, and feebly whispered, "No!"

"Oh, you won't, won't you?" His legs were twisted in a horrible manner.

"No!" squealed the Dormouse.

A voice came, then, calling: "Baldock! Baldock! I say, Baldock!" Baldock rose, letting the Dormouse fall. "I've got to go now, but to-night —if you don't do what we say—you'll be roasted —and see how you like that!"

Of all the threatened tortures roasting was the one that frightened the Dormouse the most. It made him sick when he thought of it. No boy had been "roasted" for a considerable time. The last had been more than a year ago, in Bunt's House, and a fine row there had been about it.

But the Dormouse felt that on this occasion Baldock and Crumb meant what they said. And he knew that he could not endure it. No, he could not. And if they attempted it, if they hung him up in front of the Locker Room fire, pulling his trousers tight against his thighs until they sizzled and smelt and began to burn, why then he'd give in and promise them anything that they liked, and be false to Stocky Cole. He knew that he would. It made him sick. The thought of it made him sick.

So, after Baldock had left him, the resolve came to him as though some friend had whispered it in his ear. It was the resolution that had been with him so often during his first days at the school—only apathy and unhappiness had in the last weeks dulled his purpose.

He would run away. He would run away now. He would run away this instant.

It was late afternoon and growing dark. In half an hour it would be tea time. His resolve buckled

him with fine courage. At the thought of escaping from all this, some of his old self that had been his before he came to this place returned to him. He would escape. He would not be roasted. He would not disavow Stocky Cole.

He had a shilling, a silver watch and chain and a stamp-album. If he sold these, there would be money enough until he had walked to Leicestershire. And he might get a lift in a cart.

He was suddenly happy as he had not been for weeks and weeks. He would see the garden again and the horses and the dogs. And his Mother. And the Tree.

He had no thoughts of pursuit and capture and punishment. They would not notice that he had gone. He was so unimportant that he mattered to nobody. And he wouldn't have to listen to Cresson any more. . .

He had some bright ideas. He went straight up to the dormitory (which incidentally it was forbidden to enter in the day-time). No one was about. No one saw him. He dragged out his play-box from under his bed, and in it was the stamp-album, a light-grey overcoat and a grey cloth cap. These he had worn in the holidays and they had escaped the notice of the house-matron.

With these under his arm he stole very quietly out of the dormitory, down the passage, the stairs, and into Coulter's. No one spoke to him ; no one saw him.

In another minute he was through the school gate and walking down the hill. It was so easy as to be incredible.

2

There was yet some light in the sky, a great red gash in the dusk over the sea as though the sky were bleeding. Low on the horizon little ripples of gold played and above them, studding so unexpectedly the thick, grey fabric, one bright, shining star.

It was cold. He was glad he had his grey coat. The stamp-album pressed under his arm was a kind of friendly companion. He had no sense of direction, but his plan was to find his way to the town of High Dowden, which was, he knew, but a short distance, and then to ask the road to Leicestershire. He wasn't sure whether, having found the direction, it would not be wiser to make his shilling bring him as far in the direction of Leicestershire as it would. It must, after all, be a long way to walk, because he and his father had taken some time in the train. Perhaps there was a short cut across fields or something.

The sea now drove itself in upon his consciousness, the sea that had woken him morning after morning and that had therefore been responsible, as it were, for ushering him again and again into so many horrors.

He had grown to hate the sea, but now in a moment he loved it. It was friendly, purring and whispering and crooning to him, telling him not to be afraid, not to think that he was alone, whispering to him that he was on his way home to Leicestershire. It blew, cold and salt, in his face. Cold and salt and fresh and strong.

He was strangely not afraid; indeed fear had left him for the first time in seven weeks, and that

although the dark was coming on and the hedges were mounting like walls out of the ground and his boots clattered on the road with more emphasis than anything else at all. There was only one star ; no others came ; and one bird, melancholy, forlorn, seeking what it could not find.

But he did not care. He had his stamp-album and he was free of Baldock and Cresson and soon he would be in Leicestershire.

Oddly enough there came into his head lines of a piece of poetry that his mother had taught him only this very last time before he came away. He had not thought of the lines during all this time at Crale, but now they came crowding into his head. He remembered them all in the right order—but then, before he came to Crale, he had been very good at remembering poetry. At Crale he could never remember anything :

> Morning and evening
> Maids heard the goblins cry :
> " Come buy our orchard fruits,
> Come buy, come buy.
> Apples and quinces,
> Lemons and oranges,
> Plump unpecked cherries,
> Melons and raspberries,
> Bloom-down-cheeked peaches. . . ."

Especially he liked that line :

> Bloom-down-cheeked peaches. . . .

His mother had explained to him exactly how that was.

> Morning and evening
> Maids heard the goblins cry :

And at the word " goblins " a delicious warm shiver had crept down his spine and he had put up his hand into his mother's warm one and sighed with happiness at the lovely time they were having. . . .

Two things made him pause. One was that he was at a cross-roads, the other that the heel of his right foot was already sore. He had to confess now to a little uneasiness. He could not have come very far from the School and yet it was as though only he were alive in all the world. The light was so dim that you could scarcely see the direction post, that had in its pointing fingers something mysterious, as though it warned you. No light from any window anywhere, only the wind rustling through the grass and the clap-clap-clap of the sea, now very close at hand.

But he had a great spirit (when he was not in the underworld of Crale) and he would not be, thus early, deterred. So he stumped on, his head in the air, his eyes staring at that one bright, glittering star and, over and over again in his head, as though someone inside himself were singing there, the words :

Apples and quinces,
Lemons and oranges,
Plump unpecked cherries,
Melons and raspberries. . . .

He stumbled along (it was growing *really* dark now) and then, before he knew anything about it, there he was, falling over short, thick grass and tumbled plump on to his face right on the sea-shore itself !

He stood up, feeling in spite of himself rather frightened. The sea was very near to him now and the white line of the waves as they turned over shone in a kind of rhythmic phosphorescence, as though they carried lanterns inside them. Very near was the sea and a fine pounding noise it made as it came down and turned over with a slap like tumbling out of bed, and then drew back with a hissing, grinding noise as though it would drag the Dormouse with it.

He stood there, hesitating, not knowing quite what to do. He had not meant to come down on to the sea-shore. This was not really the best way by which to reach Leicestershire. But the light now was so strangely odd and veiled that it was difficult to make sure of anything. He did not wish, however, to go back the way that he had come, so, clutching the stamp-album under his arm as though his whole safety depended on his retaining it, he went on over the wet and shivering sand.

Then he saw, to his left, a white, gleaming path, and he took this and it climbed upwards. As he left the sea and its roar became muffled, he felt cheered again. He *must* be on the right path now, but perhaps it was a pity that he had started so late in the day. If he had waited until to-morrow. . . . Then with a shiver he remembered. That would never have done, because it was to-night that they meant to roast him, and at the thought that he had escaped all that and would never, never return to it, his spirits went up and up and he was, inside himself, singing :

Melons and raspberries,
Bloom-down-cheeked peaches. . . .

and, then, later on (he forgot the bit in the middle):

> Currants and gooseberries,
> Bright fire-like barberries,
> Figs to fill your mouth,
> Citrons from the South,
> Sweet to tongue and sound to eye;
> Come buy, come buy.

His mother had told him what "barberries" were, but he had forgotten. A nice word, anyway. "Barberries, barberries, barberries. . . ."

He was pressing up the hill now with little sharp pants, and his heel, when he thought of it (which he mustn't do), was hurting a good deal. How was he going to walk all the way to Leicestershire with a sore heel? Later on he would sleep somewhere under a hedge and rest it. The thought of sleeping under a hedge was very exciting.

Climbing with a last little victorious pant to the ridge above the sea, he had the surprise of his young life because—oh, most unexpectedly!—he was in a world full of lights and noise and bustle. He realized at once that he was quite close to a station and then, after that, understood that this must be the station connected with the School; so that in all these wanderings of his he had come as yet but little more than a mile—and he had to confess to himself that he was already tired and cold, yes, and hungry. However, here there might be a train that would be going straight away to Leicestershire, and he might have a chance to creep into a corner of it and nobody see him, and so be carried all the way.

He knew, however, that this was the School station and that although he was wearing his grey overcoat and his home cap, nevertheless the sight of a small boy wandering loosely all by himself about the place would rouse their suspicions, so he determined to be very careful.

There were caverns of colour where the gas lamps spluttered, and dark walls of mist and ebony between; he could not see very well, and he nearly fell forward over some railway lines—then, looking up, saw straight in front of him a long line of railway trucks.

These, as he looked at them, moved forward a little, then stopped with a jerk and a slither. He had at once the notion—why not climb into one of them? They were empty; no one was about; they were going in the right direction, and so they must then, wherever their journey ended, carry him closer to Leicestershire than he was now. When they stopped he could climb out and inquire the way. They were not deep trucks. Voices were in the distance. The engine hooted like a distressed cow, but no one was near.

In another moment he had climbed up, hung on to the top and dropped inside.

Then in a corner he crouched, his heart beating loud tom-toms because of his grand and, indeed, amazing adventure.

3

He was very small, and the truck had absorbed him. Yes, and more than the truck, because in another five minutes he was asleep, forgetting the

hard surface on which he was lying, the cold, the strangeness and mystery of the gathering evening.

He dreamed that he tumbled from a great height straight into the Leicestershire garden, that he fell on to the lawn with no hurt to himself, but only, sitting there, looked up to see his mother standing as she had often stood, in her wide, floppy hat, her gardening gloves on and holding the garden scissors ; and that she said in her ordinary, unsurprised voice : " Well, there you are ! I was wondering where you were. Now let's come and get some flowers for the house."

And then off they went, his hand clasped by one of the cool gardening gloves, and talking as though he hadn't been away ever. Indeed, he had *not* been away. He had had a dream within his dream, a dream of some horrible place and some horrible people, and he would not think of this nor tell his mother about it.

They went across the bright lawn soaked in sun and then through the little door in the rosy-lichened garden wall, and there were all the flowers, red and yellow and blue, their faces all smiling in the sun, and butterflies dancing in the air.

As he slept, all the stars came out and the trucks went bumping on through fields and woods, up hills and down into valleys, cluttering through the evening air, chatting to themselves, passing the message on, perhaps, from one to another that here was a small boy fast asleep and what had they better do about it ?

All through the night he slept and nobody found

him ; nobody, except the trucks, knew that he was there.

When he woke, it was so still that he might have been dead. Then, close in his ear as though standing on the truck above him, a cock crew. He sat up, rubbing his eyes, and at once was aware that his body was very sore, his face and hands very dirty and that he was lost.

This might be Leicestershire, but it didn't look like it. In fact, it didn't look like anything that he had ever seen before. The trucks were still and silent. There was no movement anywhere. About him was the grey half-light of an autumn morning. No sign of a railway station, but on one side of the line a hard, white road and on the other a thick, overhanging black wood.

He was terribly cold, colder than he had ever been in his life before, and he knew that he would have to take great care of himself or he would begin to cry.

He must not stay in the truck, that was clear ; someone would see him, scold him, perhaps send him to prison, and although prison was not so bad as Crale, yet it was not the place where he wanted to be.

He tried to climb out, but at first his legs were so stiff and his body so sore that he had no control over himself. However, the edge of the truck was very low, and at last, with a kind of scramble and scuffle, he was over and sitting disconsolately on the grass at the side of the road.

The cold drove him and he started walking forward. But he did not like this world. He had

never known before what the world was like when there was nobody in it. He realized for the first time (and he was to realize it very often again) that people weren't of such importance to the world as he had thought them. It seemed, indeed, that the trees of that black wood looked on him with great disapproval. He began to be frightened of the trees and ran a little way to escape them, but the trees kept pace with him and ran faster than he did.

Hunger was now a great question. He *was* hungry. He could eat anything. There were indeed two cottages on his right, but they were absolutely dead, their window-panes as cold as himself.

Then he realized that he had left his stamp-album in the truck. This was awful for him. The stamp-album was the only hope he had of ever reaching Leicestershire, and the only friend he had, too.

He walked back down the road to find it, but now all the trucks were exactly alike. There was nothing to show him which had been his. Even as he watched them a whistle blew in the distance and all the trucks, chattering and whispering, began to move. He couldn't stop them. He could only look at them as they bumped past him. Soon, one following another as though acting under secret orders, they were gone. Then, indeed, he felt desolate. If the world had been empty before, now it was *naked*. The black wood seemed to step down the hill and advance towards him. So then, seized with real panic, he started to run, and his heel dug knives into him and everything began to

run with him, the wood, the cottages, the railway-line.

He ran, staggered, nearly fell, ran again, stumbled, then caught his foot in a large stone, crashed to the ground, the black wood tumbling on to the top of him, and sank into a pitch of darkness.

CHAPTER X

RETURN OF THE DORMOUSE

I

NOBODY missed the Dormouse until Tea Call-Over.

His name was read over three times and, there being no answer, a mark was placed against it. But Tea Call-Over was not important, because there was Chapel Call-Over at seven. The School Prefect wrote his name with a number of others at the bottom of his paper and hurried off to his own tea in his study.

His immediate table companions—Cresson, Ellys-Roberts and others—were also not disturbed, save that they missed his jam and potted meat.

An hour-and-a-half later came Chapel. This was one of the two occasions in the day when the whole school met, every boy answering to his name, beginning with the lowest form, and then passing into the Chapel.

It was Cresson who, always on the scent for a sensation, noticed that the Dormouse was absent. As he pushed into Chapel with the other small

animals, all tumbling and shoving against one another, he whispered to Standing Minor :

" I say, where's the Dormouse ? "

" I don't know—why ? " asked Standing.

" He wasn't at Tea Call-Over either."

" P'raps he's sick." And, forgetting outside affairs, they played noughts-and-crosses happily through the prayers.

After Chapel the head House Prefect—Whymper by name—brought into Leeson's study the Call-Over absentees.

Leeson was about to go upstairs and dress for his own dinner. He threw a careless eye over the two lists. Then he straightened up : " Hullo ! " he said. " What's this ? Morgan absent from both Tea and Chapel Call-Over ! The Matron hasn't reported him sick. . . ."

" I'll go and see, sir," said Whymper, and departed.

Leeson waited, standing in front of his splendid fire, warming his back. He wasn't at all worried about the Dormouse's non-attendance, but the appearance of his name brought other thoughts. All had not been well during the last weeks in the Locker Room. Reports had been brought to him that there was a great deal of unrest among the small boys and that a quarrel had developed between Staire and Cole and that the small boys had championed this. He had heard rumours also that this quarrel was being made the excuse for a good deal of " ragging " ; even, possibly, of some bullying.

He was distressed about this for two reasons.

He followed the policy (in spite of his nickname and house reputation) of interfering as little as possible in the inside affairs of the House; he left these things to his Prefects. That was well enough when his House Prefects were strong, as they had been last year; this year they promised to be weak, and he felt, all through his House, tremblings and stirrings that foreboded trouble and meant that discipline was relaxed.

He was disappointed in Whymper. Secondly he was disappointed in young Cole. He liked that boy; ever since he had come to Crale he had liked him. He had promised, in spite of some young animal wildness, to develop into exactly the right sort of boy, courageous, honest, sensible, with a feeling for responsibility and with humour. But now it seemed that, with him as with so many boys, he could not stand up to a little independence and authority. Ever since he had had his Study this term he had changed. He had not looked so happy, some of the "gusto" had gone out of him, and here he was developing a quarrel with a boy of his own standing, until the whole of the Lower House was upset by it.

And, now he thought of it, it was this very boy, young Morgan, who had been mentioned to him as a target of this Locker Room bullying. He must look into it, and if Cole was making a disturbance he must lose his Study for the rest of the Term. A nuisance with a nice boy like that. . . .

At this point Whymper returned. "No, sir. The Matron hasn't seen him. He's all right, as far as she knows."

"All right—and not turned up for two call-overs?"

"Yes, sir."

"He must be found at once and brought to me."

"Yes, sir."

Whymper departed.

2

By the beginning of evening Prep. everyone in Leeson's knew that the Dormouse was missing. Here was a sensation, a lovely, mouth-filling, heart-warming sensation!

Bennett, one of the younger, newer masters, who was in charge of the Preparation, could do nothing to stem the current of eager, thrilling comment that ran under the forms, through the benches, up the trousers, out of the shirts, into the collars. "Silence there! Who's that talking? Who's that? Stand up there!"

"Please, sir, I wasn't talking."

"Sit down and get on with your work."

"Who threw that note there? You, Cresson, bring it to me."

"Please, sir, I didn't write it."

"Never mind; bring it to me."

On a dirty, tumbled bit of paper was scrawled: "Dormouse has drowned himself because Baldock was going to roast him."

"Who wrote this?"

No answer.

Then, rather weakly: "If I have any more trouble, I shall set everyone fifty lines."

But of course he did have more trouble, yes, until the hour was over. And behind his own words and actions was the thought, over and over again: "That poor little kid! I wonder what has happened to him. Something bad's been going on here."

Because he was new to his job he was a sentimentalist. Indeed, he wrote poetry and sent it to the London papers.

Jeremy heard the news. He was sitting gazing into the shape of Uncle Samuel's sheep, puzzling over the lines of the "Æneid." A head was poked in through the door. It was Stevenson, from the next study.

"I say, have you heard?"

"No, what?"

In the ordinary run of events he would be working in Big Class Room with the Lower School, but to-night he had been given special study-leave, a favour occasionally to be won from an indulgent prefect, under the plea of a terrible strain of overwork. Gauntlet had also been given it and was alone with him there.

"The Dormouse has drowned himself."

"What?"

"Yes, he ran away this afternoon because they were going to roast him, and he's drowned himself."

The head was withdrawn.

Gauntlet whistled. "Crikey!" he said.

But Jeremy said nothing. The news was too awful for any words.

And at once he knew that he was connected with it. For weeks he had known in his heart that in

some way he was connected with the Dormouse, that, whether he wished it or no, he ought to do something about the Dormouse. He had known it, but he had done nothing.

Gauntlet, as his inevitable way was, said the true but unpleasant thing.

"This is all because of your row with Staire, Stocky."

"Oh, shut up!" Jeremy would willingly have murdered Gauntlet at that moment.

All because of his row with Staire? No, that wasn't true, but what *was* true was that he ought to have done something for the Dormouse, helped him in some way, made things easier for him.

He had known that the kid liked him. Fellows had told him so. Besides, he could be sure of it by the way that the kid sometimes looked at him, and it was just because the kid looked at him like that that he had felt uncomfortable and kept away from him.

But, sitting there, seeing the Dormouse drowned, his dead, dripping body even now in Leeson's study, it was now that he knew the sharpest, acutest moment of all his young life—and the bitterest.

"Perhaps it isn't true," he said, turning to Gauntlet.

"You bet it's true," said Gauntlet. "Those things always are."

"No, they aren't. Chaps will say anything."

Nevertheless, he was sure that it *was* true. He had been forewarned. Fifty times of late his conscience had urged him, "Go into the Locker Room and see what Baldock and Crumb are doing."

And he had not gone because he had wanted to leave it all alone, because he felt that he had "grown out" of that kind of thing. And now the Dormouse was drowned!

Sitting there, he looked back to that moment a few days ago when he had stopped the Dormouse and spoken to him. How the kid had started when he had put his hand on his shoulder! Nice kid, too, really, if he'd cleaned himself up a bit and respected himself. . . . He shivered. What was the use of that *now?* The kid was dead. Drowned himself because they were going to roast him. And he might have stopped it. He was almost as good as a murderer.

The door opened and Whymper came in.

"Cole, would you mind going to Leeson? He wants you in his study."

"Would you mind. . . .?" So like Whymper to be polite.

Cole went out, Gauntlet following him with inquisitive, impersonal gaze. In the passage boys were standing about.

"Hullo, Stocky! Where are you going?" He didn't answer them. He went straight through. He expected to see the Dormouse's body laid out, under a sheet, on Leeson's sofa. He was trembling all over as he turned the handle of Leeson's study door.

Immense relief came to him when, coming into the warm cosy study, he saw no one and nothing there, only Leeson standing up in front of the fire.

"Well, Cole. . . . Shut the door. . . . You've heard perhaps that Morgan has run away?"

"Oh, sir. . . . Then he isn't dead!" The relief was tremendous, tremendous. He gulped in the throat.

"Dead! No—of course not. Who said he was dead?"

"The boys said he'd been found drowned, sir."

"What rot! Of course not. Ridiculous nonsense! But he's run away. He was in the same dormitory as you. I thought you might know something about it."

"No, sir. I don't know anything."

"I hear there's been some bullying going on—in the Locker Room especially, and that young Morgan has been treated worse than any of the others. Had you heard anything about it?"

"No, sir."

Leeson's voice took on an added sternness.

"Now, Cole, listen to me. I know your ridiculous code of honour. I haven't been a schoolmaster all these years without being brought up against it again and again. You're not going to sneak. That's the only idea in your head. Well, I don't want you to sneak. You needn't mention another boy's name except your own. It's about yourself I want to speak to you."

Jeremy's eyes dropped. He shifted his feet. Then he looked straight into Leeson's face. "Yes, sir," he said.

"You're in this," Leeson went on, "as I can see you very well recognize. I will begin by saying that I've been disappointed in you this half-term. Just after you came back I had you in here for a private talk. Do you remember that?"

"Yes, sir."

"I spoke to you very frankly. I told you that you were beginning to be a person of importance in this house—not much importance, but some—and that you must begin to realize that; that you had influence here especially with the smaller boys. You seemed to understand that. I had good hopes of you. But having a Study doesn't seem to have improved you at all, and all that you've done this term so far is to kick up a row with another boy which has managed to spread through all the Lower School boys in the house. Is that so or isn't it?"

"I didn't know it, sir," said Jeremy.

"Now, come! Is it true that you've had a quarrel with another boy in this house?"

"Not a quarrel exactly, sir," said Jeremy, hesitating. "We just can't stand one another. We never have."

"Oh, I see. Not a quarrel exactly, but you just can't stand one another! Not much difference as far as I can understand it. Anyway, did you know, or didn't you, that the Lower School boys were taking sides?"

"Yes, sir, I did."

"And that this boy, Morgan, because he stood up for you, had to take a good deal of bullying?"

"I'd heard about it vaguely, sir."

"You'd heard about it vaguely? Well, a year ago you wouldn't have heard about it vaguely: you'd have gone into it and seen about it. You wouldn't have been able to stand the idea that a small, new boy was being knocked about because of yourself

and that you were doing nothing to stop it. Isn't that so ? "

Jeremy hesitated—then he plunged. " You see, sir, I heard vaguely that there was some bullying in the Locker Room, and I saw that Morgan didn't look very cheerful ; but I didn't think it was my business to go back into the Locker Room now that I was in a Study. I've hated this row with Staire, and I don't think he's wanted it either, sir. We never could stick one another, but we didn't want to go for one another either, only chaps sort of shoved us at one another. But I knew I ought to do something about Morgan. I've been feeling it for some time. But I thought that, if I went back into the Locker Room and began kicking up a row, that everyone taking sides about me and Staire as they were, it would only make things much worse, you see, sir."

Leeson couldn't help himself. Whenever he came into direct contact with this boy he liked him. The boy was as honest and sturdy in character as he was in build. He stood there exactly as he was, and he looked Leeson in the face without flinching.

However, Leeson had no time just then for sentiment or heroics. He was worried desperately by this business. Worried because it was abominable to think that in his house this child, who was hardly out of the nursery, had been bullied so badly that he had had to run away to escape it ; worried for the reputation of his beloved House ; worried for the reputation of his beloved School. So he regarded Jeremy sternly.

" I don't like it, Cole. You mightn't have had

much to do with this directly, but you've had a lot to do with it indirectly. You've been here three years. You've got influence, as I've said. You might have stopped this and you didn't."

Jeremy might have said that that was the business of the House Prefects, but he didn't say anything at all.

"I expect you to help me here, not to hinder me," Leeson added.

"Yes, sir," said Jeremy.

There was a pause.

"Well, you can go. Remember what I've said."

"Yes, sir."

He went. The Dormouse wasn't drowned: that was one thing. On the other hand, everyone thought him a rotter. He wasn't sure that they weren't right, but he wasn't going to show them that they were.

3

By Morning Chapel every boy in the school knew what had happened—that a small kid in Leeson's had run away. This event bound for an instant the whole school together as only certain things—Speech Day, the Rugby Match against Callendar, the Cricket Match against the Old Boys, or a very particular scandal—could do. Every boy was thinking that morning of Leeson's, thinking with a peculiar mixture of pride, interest, self-righteousness and speculation.

It was two-and-a-half years now since any boy had run away. Then it had been two Sixth Form

boys in Haggard's House. They had been in London a whole week and had had a delightful time, then, forcibly returning, had been publicly flogged and had proclaimed the adventure worth it.

But this was different. By First School everyone knew that this kid, Morgan, had run away because he had been bullied within half an inch of his young life. Here much virtuous Pharisaical judgment! Just what you would expect of Leeson's—a rotten House, anyway. What was Paddy Leeson doing not to interfere before it had come to this?

And then, with this, some nervousness on the part of various pasty-faced, over-stout gentlemen who had been trying their hands, once and again, at a little private fun of their own. It was said that half Leeson's would be expelled.

By mid-morning the names of Stocky Cole and Staire were much discussed. They were both of them known beyond their House because of their games ability. So far as Cole had been known he had been liked, "a plucky little devil." Staire was not so popular, "apt to put on side." And here they were. They had, between them, bullied apparently the whole of Leeson's Lower School. So said one version.

Another story ran that Cole was the kid Morgan's protector and that Staire had attempted to lure him away—*Hinc illæ lacrimæ*. Another account was that Cole kept a number of small boys to practise his Rugger half-back tricks upon and that every night he forced them to scrum and knocked them about to keep himself in form.

And there was young Morgan himself. Some

said that he had been kidnapped by gipsies and was now being held to ransom ; others that he had paid a fisherman to row him out to sea, had boarded an Atlantic liner and was now half-way to America ; others that his father had come in the dusk of the evening, carried him off and was now threatening Leeson with the law.

The small boys of the Lower School were, of course, especially thrilled with this splendid adventure. They were eager with narratives of what they would have done had they been in Morgan's place. Some of them wished that they had gone off, too, and thought of home with sighs and longings ; others couldn't see what he wanted to run away for ; others hoped " he would jolly well catch it " when they brought him back ; others, taking with great gusto the gloomiest view, said that of course he had drowned himself in the sea, that he would never be found and that fishes were now devouring his bones.

Great fun for nearly everybody. A few suffered and, of them all, perhaps Jeremy the most.

When, afterwards, he looked back, he could never remember the events of that awful morning. He dragged himself through morning school, trying to escape the endless questions ; the joyful prophecies—" By Jove, *you'll* catch it, Stocky ; " the false consolations, the unkindly jeers.

At mid-day he escaped away to that field that overlooked the sea, his favoured place, and there, although a cold, sharp wind was blowing, stood looking across the bending, writhing trees to the grey, chequered sea, where the white caps were like

little fragments of paper blown about its ruffled surface.

After all, what had he to do with it ? Why was he being jumped on by everybody ? He hadn't bullied anybody ; he had never been unkind to the boy ; he had scarcely ever spoken to him. Why should Leeson be disappointed in him ? He had been behaving better this term than ever before, sticking to his work, not ragging anyone, playing football to the best of his ability—why was everything going wrong ?

But in his heart he knew that, in some way or another, he had missed the right thing. He wasn't happy. He hadn't been happy for weeks. He had half-quarrelled with Jumbo, his best friend ; he had kept to himself ; he hadn't been jolly with everyone as he used to be. And then he had been a coward about the Dormouse. He could have looked after the kid, who was, after all, in his dormitory. He had seen, quite clearly, how miserable the kid was, but he had avoided him lest fellows should laugh at him or hint beastly things or think him " soppy."

He was changing ; things weren't as simple as they had been. A year ago, as Leeson had said, he would have " jumped right in," had a row in the Locker Room and claimed the Dormouse as his property. He would have done it all without thinking. Now he thought about everything and a lot of good it did him !

Most of all did he hope that Ridley knew nothing of this. Ridley wasn't the sort of fellow, he imagined, to care whether or no a small kid at the

bottom of the school had run away. It was probable that he had heard nothing about it, or, if he had, that he did not connect Jeremy with it.

But as he stood there Jeremy had an impulse, as powerful as any he had ever known, to go off to Ridley now and to explain to him that he had never done the Dormouse any harm and that it was not his fault that the kid had run away.

And a nice soft thing that would be to do! Ridley, to whom Jeremy had never addressed one word in all his life, who did not know in all probability that Jeremy even existed. And yet of all the trouble connected with this affair this was the worst!—that Ridley should think badly of him, should say, perhaps, "That chap Cole must be a rotter;" should look at him, maybe in Chapel, with a quick disapproving glance, and, after that, never consider him again.

Of all the possibilities this was the worst. Better that Ridley should never, to the end of his days, be conscious that Jeremy existed, rather than think badly of him.

Behind these thoughts all the time—the consciousness that the Dormouse must have suffered badly to do a thing like this. He must have had weeks of misery and bullying and home-sickness. Those swine, Crumb and Baldock! And, as Jeremy thought of them he hated Staire more deeply than ever before. He must do something to get at Staire, must fight him, or, at least, tell him to his face what he thought of him. Things had gone too far. No one should say now that he

was a coward or wanted to keep his place safe for the football.

Let the football go to blazes ! With which heroic resolve, his head up, he strode back to Coulter's.

That evening, just before tea, everyone knew that the Dormouse had been found, brought back, and was even now in the infirmary.

4

At fever-pitch the excitement. The Dormouse had returned ; now for punishment.

Although only two days ago the Dormouse's personality had been so small as to be almost invisible, it swelled, over-night as it were, into balloon proportions. He had become, because of this escapade, a kind of Robin Hood—Munchausen—Jack-the-Ripper. He had returned " to wreck his vengeance on his tormentors," as Marlowe put it. Marlowe, indeed, informed Jeremy that he had torn up two of the chapters in his present romance, " The Trump of Doom," reality for the moment proving itself so much greater than fiction. He would rewrite them on Dormouse lines. He intended, if it were possible, to have an interview with the Dormouse in the infirmary and to get from him the minutely accurate details of his adventure. Marlowe was, in fact, one of the early apostles of the realism of to-day, now so popular.

Meanwhile, details of the Dormouse's " finding " varied. On one hand it was asserted that he had been found, nearly murdered, in a lonely house on

a windy common. Another version had it that he had been discovered bound hand-and-foot to a post, waiting for the encroaching sea to devour him. On all hands it was agreed :

(1) That he had had a romantic time.

(2) That he was a plucky kid.

(3) That he held Baldock, Crumb and Co. in the hollow of his hand.

Interest in truth passed that night rather swiftly from the personal history of the Dormouse to the yet more intriguing question of the fate of his persecutors—and especially Crumb and Baldock.

Expulsion was the least that could happen to them. Possibly expulsion and a public flogging before the whole school first.

And, behind them, the aloof figure of Staire.

And, behind him, young Cole.

There was some revelation of character in the manner in which these two boys, Crumb and Baldock, took this pause before punishment. They had both undergone interviews with Leeson ; they were both aware, by semi-ostracism, that everyone expected them to suffer the worst ; they must, both of them, have passed an exceedingly unpleasant day.

Crumb minded. He minded very badly indeed. He wilted from hour to hour. All the stuffing dropped out of him ; you could almost see the sawdust scattering the ground about him. He was frightened, terribly frightened, and he only increased his fear by going to his intimates and inquiring of them his probable fate. This delighted them, and they exercised all their

imagination and fancy in outlining possible penalties for him.

When he went to bed that night he wished himself dead.

It was very different with Baldock. He really could not see what the fuss was all about, or why the kid had run away. He was very fond of the Dormouse. He always had been. His attitude to him was precisely that of a Roman noble who had been robbed of his favourite slave. He was a very decent little kid and had understood Baldock properly. It was true that he had been very irritating and aggravating about young Cole, and some "moral suasion" had been necessary to persuade him to look at the matter in the proper light, but that had been young Stocky's fault. Why hadn't he interfered? After all, he knew what was happening. If he didn't like it, he should have said so.

In any case, he, Baldock, wasn't intending to let the business interfere with his personal happiness. If they did expel him, there were plenty of other schools. If they whacked him, that didn't last long and he had a tough skin. He found life much too jolly to let a little thing like this spoil his sleep. He was quite sincere in this. There was no swaggering pose. He had no nerves and no fear. He won much admiration among his companions. In after-life he had the nickname of "The Buccaneer." He made a number of people unhappy in the course of his pilgrimage, but never himself.

5

Meanwhile, the hero of the day was sitting up in the infirmary talking to his father. There was nothing very much the matter with him. When he had fallen in the uncertain light of that early morning, he had knocked his head on a stone, and there was a large bruise to testify to that. A farmer driving his cart into market had discovered him, picked him up, carried him to a neighbouring farmhouse, revived him, discovered his origins and telegraphed to the school. He had been brought back by train late that afternoon and his father had arrived shortly afterwards.

He looked extremely small, sitting up in a very large, woolly dressing-gown, eating his supper. He was cleaner and happier than he had been for many weeks. Everyone was very nice to him. It was difficult not to be. He looked such a baby.

The point was, whether or no he would return home to Leicestershire with his father.

"I'm disappointed with you for not sticking it," his father said to him. "Our family must stick anything."

Quite so; but the Dormouse most urgently endeavoured to make it plain that there hadn't "been anything to stick."

There hadn't been any bullying. No one had threatened to roast him; he had had a most charming time. Everyone had been sweetness itself to him.

"Then what did you want to run away for?" his father naturally inquired.

Oh, he didn't know. It had just happened like that. He thought he'd see what it was like. He knew that it was very wrong. He wouldn't do it again.

Well, then, would he come home now, back to Leicestershire, stay away for the remainder of the term, come back next term ?

There must have been a great conflict in his young heart. Here, offered to him without any pains or penalties, was the very thing for which, for weeks, he had been longing. On the other hand, he had a very clear picture in his mind of the thing to which, if he stayed, he would be returning. The Locker Room, Baldock, Roasting. . . .

But, oddly enough, the issue was clear. He would remain. He knew that his father wanted him " to stick it out." In some odd, undefined way he wanted himself " to stick it out."

No, he wouldn't go home. He would stay.

So he kissed his father, finished his egg and bread-and-butter, turned over, and went to sleep.

CHAPTER XI

DARK DAYS

I

DAIME, "The Camel," Crale's head master, stood on a small piece of rising ground, under a gaunt and writhen tree, like God, surveying what he had made.

Only he was not like God, being dreamy, shy and inconsequent. And he was like God, also, because he was determined, ruthless and gifted with humour.

He had not made Crale—he knew that well—but as he stood on that lovely October day of blue and amber, near his House, he could see, as though into a bee-hive, every nook and cranny, and he knew that if he hadn't made that hive he had at least coloured it a little with his own pet paints.

And he loved it. He loved it for its beauty, standing with its old cream-coloured, ivory stone, so strong and ancient above the sea; he loved it for the life in it because, without idealizing them, he cared deeply for his fellow men; he loved it for the youth in it because he was himself young and would always be young; he loved it for the strength and optimism of it, a strength that he was

for ever hindering from arrogance, an optimism that must never become self-conceit; but most of all he loved it because it was for him England, and, without any greedy Imperialism (and that was an Imperialistic time) or any Pharisaic patriotism he adored England, her hills and fields, rivers and little ports, her poetry, humour and common-sense, her past, her present and her strange intriguing future, as he adored nothing and nobody else on the face of this globe.

So he looked down upon Crale and found her good. He knew her faults better than any other could possibly know them. He was for ever engaged in a battle with all the baser elements of ugliness, arrogance, impurity, convention, that must always attack an institution that is made from tradition and selection, but he loved the battle, he scented it from afar, like an old war horse, and he fought, never resting, untiring, but only escaping once and again, as every dreamer does, into the safe quiet land of his own fancy.

Standing there under a cumulous of ivory-white cloud, looking over the russet-coloured land, he saw all the business and rhythm of the place, the little box-like rooms, the networks of passages, the large open places, the Chapel cool and dark, the high gymnasium light and shining, smelling of ropes and leather and beeswax, the long dining rooms now bare and empty, the dormitories more bare and more empty, the class-rooms just now humming a restless, stirring, quivering life, ideas, thoughts, beauties, old sterilities, new thrusting discoveries, being dropped like bright-winged flies into the

waters to catch the gliding darting trout; all the thoughts of all the brains of the past circling and hovering there, but the fish for the most part reluctant, scornful, impertinent; only in a rare while, when something just to their taste comes glittering down, they jump, they bite, they are caught, landed . . . yes, and then off the hook, slipping down the bank into the water again not to be caught next time so easily and yet with a taste, a savour in their gullets that will never again quite forsake them.

Oh, a great sport! Worthy of a man's life-time energy and self-discipline and courage. A work in the world that *is* a work and not a mere selfish lazy fantasy. He turned eagerly in the fresh, sunshiny, nipping air and saw Leeson approaching.

He liked Leeson increasingly. Of all the staff Leeson was the man who was in process of becoming his friend; making friends with Daime was a slow, cautious business. He did not surrender himself easily, but when at last he did, his surrender was complete.

Leeson joined him, under the silver cloud, on the shiny knoll.

"Well," said the Camel, "and what of the runaway?"

Leeson sighed. "Oh, he's all right. Stuffing himself with grub and holding on tight to his code of honour—not to give anyone away. No one's been pressing him very hard. All the same he's a plucky kid. I'm afraid he's had a nasty time before he ran off and I'm to blame."

"No," said Daime. "Not if you leave things

to the House Prefects. That's the best way, even if they do occasionally let you down."

"They're not going to be a strong lot this year, I'm afraid. The worst of it is that the boys under them have got the personalities that *they* ought to have. Young Cole and Staire are the trouble. I'm not sure that one of them shouldn't be moved into another House."

"Won't that be rather admitting defeat?" said Daime. "And those are two remarkable boys who'll do credit to the House next year."

"Who knows," said Leeson despondently, "how they'll develop in the meantime? They are just at the 'awkward year' both of them. Last term I would have sworn to Cole anywhere—exactly the type of boy we want. But this term—whether having a Study has gone to his head or whether his hostility to Staire is twisting him——" Leeson broke off. "I don't trust him as I did."

Daime nodded his head.

"I've noticed it again and again. That move up from the Lower School is the ticklish time. But I would bet on young Cole. There's not a boy in the school I'm more sure of."

"How do you keep track of them all?" Leeson burst out admiringly. "It's all I can do to know the boys of my House. But *you* . . ."

Daime watched the silver cloud threading now into wisps of crystal thread.

"My job . . . my passion . . . my curiosity. And it grows with every year more absorbing, more intriguing, more touching, Leeson, to have the job you love to do, to have the physical strength

to do it, to feel the beauty in it and the drama. . . . Yes, I'm a lucky man. More than my deserts."

The two men, brought close together by a common vision, stood there for a while in silence. Then they turned to walk together towards the house.

"What I want to have," said Leeson, at last, "is your advice in this. These two, Staire and Cole, am I to let them go for one another, because it's coming to that, or shall I put my foot down and separate them?"

"Let them fight it out," Daime answered. "There's less bad blood that way. Keep your eye on them but if it comes to a fight don't interfere. And look out for the Lower School ragging. Unless I'm very far out young Morgan is going to find himself a bit of a hero—and it will go to his head. If it doesn't, he'll be a child worth watching." He put his hand on Leeson's shoulder. They stood there listening to the hurtling rumble of the sea.

"Beautiful place," Daime murmured. "It's good to be alive!"

2

Young Jeremy Cole was unfortunately not finding life, at this moment, as beautiful as his head master did. He was very unhappy indeed, more unhappy perhaps than he had ever been before.

The chief reason of this unhappiness was that it was, in its essence, unsubstantial. When, in earlier days, there had been troubles they had been easily defined. If he thought, he could bring them up from the very earliest days—the time when he had

been forbidden to go to the pantomime because he had lied about brushing his teeth; the day when he had fought the Dean's Ernest; the awful hour when his mother had nearly died; the night when the Sea Captain had entered their house and robbed it; the terrible occasion when he had been accused of stealing money to buy Christmas presents; the night when Hamlet had died—yes, these had been definite enough . . . and at school too, always before, rows, anxieties, pains and penalties, you had been able to see all round them—you got what you deserved or you didn't get what you deserved, the fact was definite enough.

But now, for weeks, trouble had been piling up around him; now it had reached its climax. Everyone knew that he was in trouble; everyone behaved to him as though he *were* in trouble, but what had he done? Why should he be in disgrace? It was almost as though he had committed some crime.

He had been from his very tenderest years a boy who liked jollity and friendliness and a fine open relationship with his fellows. And until this term that was what he had always had. He had taken such a relationship for granted.

He was feeling now, for the first time in his life, what it was to be unpopular. He had behaved, in some way or another, badly over this affair of the Dormouse. Jumbo, with all the frankness of one whose best friend is in a mess, told him just what everyone was saying. Everyone was saying in the main three things:

(1) That he was stuck-up.

(2) That he had bullied the Dormouse.

(3) That he wasn't as good a football player as he thought he was.

Now the second of these accusations was quite obviously unfair. Far from bullying the Dormouse he had scarcely ever spoken to him, and when he had spoken to him it had been, save on one hasty occasion, in kindness.

As to being stuck-up he could only say that he didn't *feel* stuck-up. The crowd is fond of this accusation and makes it often on the slightest grounds. I knew a boy once who was for years charged with conceit and this because his pince-nez would tilt forward on to his nose and so force him to lift his chin into the air.

But with Jeremy it was always the last thing to be said. He had never thought very much of himself, because he had never thought of himself at all. He had had, of course, his proper pride; he could stand up for himself when need be, but his bump of admiration for others was a large one. He had always a catalogue of heroes and would always have, his life through.

Bewildered, he inquired of Jumbo whether *he* thought he was stuck-up.

"No," said Jumbo, but added, "You don't rag around as you used to." No, he didn't. That was true. He thought about that. Mere rags with no reason about them were not as amusing as they used to be. For one thing there seemed to be less time for them. What with football, and reading books like "Dracula," and trying to swot up things for Parlow, and listening to chaps like Marlowe, there wasn't so much time.

And with whom were you now to rag ? He didn't want to return to the rough and scrabble of the Lower School. When you had a Study you had a Study. It was different. He knew, moreover, as Jumbo talked to him, that the entry of Ridley into his life (quite unknown to Ridley) had made a difference. When he thought of Ridley, which was now very often, he didn't want to " rag " just about nothing. He wanted to talk to Ridley, he wanted it more than anything else in the world, save only of course his First Fifteen Colours. There were so many things that he would like to ask Ridley. Things that somehow he wouldn't dream of asking Jumbo. And yet he had never exchanged one word with Ridley and, in all probability, never would.

Nevertheless, the main trouble was of course this affair of the Dormouse, and about that he must do something. But what ?

The Dormouse no longer needed his defence. Since his return the Dormouse had become popular. In the first place he had run away, been brought back and not punished. That showed great cleverness on his part. In the second place he had refused to sneak. He hadn't mentioned a single name. He had laid no charge.

Fabulous stories were now told of him. His father was a millionaire, his mother the most beautiful woman in England, and himself, if only given the opportunity, would astonish the whole school with his athletic prowess. He did, indeed, develop amazingly in these new conditions. He was no longer frightened at every step, his brains (which were good ones) returned to him, he made

friends on every side. Only he hated Baldock and Ellys-Roberts. Baldock twisted his arm and pinched his legs no longer, but he shivered still at his approach; and the slimy, filthy-minded Ellys-Roberts he shuddered away from. No harm was to come to him any more from either of them—but at least he gave them no opportunity.

His worship of Jeremy was stronger than ever. When anyone abused his hero he reddened with anger. But he was shy. He was not going to risk another rebuff. Even in the dormitory he never spoke to him.

Meanwhile Crumb and Baldock, bullying being out of favour, busied themselves with the blacking of Jeremy's character. There was no crime of which they did not accuse him, and they found plenty of listeners. Everyone likes to see someone who has been popular degraded. It gives a pleasant savour to everyday monotony; it means promotion for the world in general; it just shows us all that we are not to be taken in by anyone; we can see as clearly as another, heaven be praised. And so Jeremy suffered, as many another has done, for the faults of others, his own obstinacy and the careless progress of events.

But himself, he attributed this suffering to one, and to one alone. Staire was his enemy and he was Staire's and one day Staire should know it.

3

And so he came to one of the darkest hours he was ever to encounter. For years afterwards this was to be the standard of unhappiness with him. "Is it

as bad as that time Parlow was sick with me ? Did I mind as much as that day when Parlow rated me ? "

With this experience came so many other revelations that it may be said really to have meant the passing away from him for ever of his babyhood. In the hurt and pain of it he discovered that for life a terrific stiffening and tightening of the reserve forces would be necessary. When a blow like this could descend on your head without warning, as it were, from an empty and preoccupied heaven, you *could* make no preparation against it. So, then, you must be armed against everything, yes, *everything* and everybody. Let no sentiment, warmth of feeling, loose emotion betray you. You walk forward through jungle, the enemy lying in ambush.

With this received and accepted knowledge childhood ends.

The shock that it was to him proves also the kind of boy that he was, because to many of his companions it would have been no sort of shock at all ; Parlow would have been called a beast and there's an end. To some self-seeking boys it would have been a shock of social ambition disappointed ; to some sentimental ones a shock of wounded personal esteem ; but Jeremy was neither self-seeking nor sentimental.

He was a hero-worshipper, staunch and utterly loyal. Certain acts seemed to him base and mean beyond credit, and to be accused of these acts in public the most terrible affront ; he was just at this moment lonely and sensitive without knowing why. He could not quite catch what the world was saying around him. To believe for a moment that it was

saying what Parlow said would make life impossible . . . even at its direst moment he did not believe that Parlow really meant it.

The hour began in mild and unambitious fashion. It was the English hour and the form had had for preparation the first twenty lines of Wordsworth's "Tintern Abbey." Parlow, in an earlier lesson, had read the whole poem through to them and read it well. Then he had given them his own picture of Wordsworth, escaping the "idiotic old dodderer," forgetting the egotism, self-satisfaction and complacent old age, saying nothing of the "controller of stamps," but creating for them the nobility and sincerity and humility before Nature, describing Dove Cottage, with the little hilly garden, and the Grasmere Lake, and the high rough clouds above Dunmail, and the purple shadows of Helvellyn.

For Jeremy that had been the first slender vision of a man and a country afterwards to be worshipped by him; and then when Parlow had read "Tintern Abbey," himself so deeply moved by it that, when he came to

> Therefore let the moon
> Shine on thee in thy solitary walk;
> And let the misty mountain winds be free
> To blow against thee,

his voice trembled taking a deeper note, Jeremy seemed to be moving with him, to be in unison with him and to feel what he was feeling.

He took, then, especial trouble with his lines, learning them, as he found to his surprise, very

quickly, because there was no story in them ; they were, in a way, all about nothing. The last of them delighted him, he knew just what they meant him to know :

> . . . these orchard tufts,
> Which at this season, with their unripe fruits,
> Are clad in one green hue, and lose themselves
> Among the woods and copses, nor disturb
> The wild green landscape. Once again I see
> These hedgerows, hardly hedgerows, little lines
> Of sportive wood run wild ; these pastoral farms,
> Green to the very door : and wreaths of smoke
> Sent up, in silence, from among the trees !

" In silence." Yes, that was exactly it. He would tell Uncle Samuel about that. The little old man with his little old sister, and the crooked garden, and the Lake under his window, he knew how things were !

So he went into the hour, excited with anticipatory pleasure.

He very quickly discovered that Parlow was in no good humour. You could tell that by the way that Parlow sat hunched up behind his desk, his bulk overflowing it, his face set and resolved as though it had been cast in clay.

The excitement of the earlier lesson was not there to-day and the form at once knew it, and a little wind of apprehension blew through them all.

" You're a lazy, idle lot," Parlow began, " and want jumping on. If I find anyone here who hasn't learnt this I'll jump ! "

He had a preliminary skirmish or two with poor Standing, who was very swiftly reduced to tears and condemned to write out the whole of "Tintern Abbey" four times; which little incident gave Standing a healthy loathing for the works and personality of William Wordsworth until the day of his death. Then came Staire's turn, and Staire, without hesitation or falter and also without feeling or intelligence, yielded up the first four lines gracefully and with a fine air of being kind to the poor old poet. He kept, with admirable precision, his social distance.

Parlow may have perceived this and been irritated by it, but he said only, "Right. Cole, go on."

Jeremy stood up and at once, facing Parlow, was staggered. He had been accustomed now for many weeks to look across the room at a friendly, smiling Parlow, ready to help him over every stile, to excuse blunders, to joke and make merry.

Here was another Parlow, hostile, scornful, impatient. There was something in Parlow's anger that frightened older and wiser heads than Jeremy's, but its worst aspect now was that Jeremy had suddenly, in a moment of time, lost a friend and that without cause or reason.

So that, thinking of this, the lines that he had known so perfectly only a moment before deserted him. He began:

Once again
Do I behold . . .

Then stopped. He listened to his own voice

stopping. Parlow listened. The class listened. He started once more :

Once again
Do I behold these steep . . .

There were no words in his head, only cobwebs, spiders, twisted skeins of wool.

" Well ? " said Parlow.

He could think of nothing.

" . . . These steep and lofty cliffs," said Parlow.

" . . . These steep and lofty cliffs," said Jeremy.

" That on a wild . . ."

" That on a wild . . ." said Jeremy.

" Yes," said Parlow. " Write out the poem four times." Then, raising his voice a little, he said :

" You have been too preoccupied knocking about boys smaller than yourself, I suppose. Takes up too much time to leave you any for work. Any other small boy run away because he's frightened of you, Cole ? Fine way to spend your time. I congratulate you."

The class was delighted. One for Cole ! Favourite no longer.

" Carry on, Bunning," said Parlow.

Jeremy sat there staring in front of him and seeing nothing.

4

He sat on there until the end of the hour. No one paid him any attention. Parlow did not ask him questions. His ill temper seemed to leave him as though, having jetted that little spurt of

anger at Jeremy, he was satisfied, and during the last twenty minutes he lost himself eagerly in a comparison of great English poems, "Tintern Abbey," "The Ancient Mariner," "The Grecian Urn," "The Lotus Eaters." But Jeremy heard nothing. He sat there, staring before him, then when the bell rang got up and went quietly out.

The sun was shining, everyone was shouting around him. Someone came dancing up to him crying: "I say, Stocky, you are down for the Second on Saturday!" He did not know; if he had known he would not have cared.

He wanted to be by himself, to think this beastly thing out. Where should he go? The Study? There would be Gauntlet or Marlowe. He must walk away somewhere.

"Any other small boy run away . . . ?" And everyone had heard. Everyone. A fool like Standing. Staire.

He looked up and there, walking straight towards him, was Ridley. Ridley with that far-away preoccupied look, slim and straight, *decent*-looking, different, somehow, from everyone else.

Why shouldn't Jeremy speak to him? Say something like: "Can I speak to you a minute? There's a rotten thing happened. . . ." But Ridley didn't know him, didn't know his name probably. Ridley would stare, mutter something, pass on confused.

Jeremy's heart was hammering, his face was crimson. Ridley came straight towards him as though he would run into him, saw him, for a

moment their eyes met, then Ridley swerved turning to the right and vanished round a corner.

Ridley, of course, didn't know him. But suppose he did know him, suppose he had heard about him and thought, "Oh, that's the fellow in Leeson's who bullies small kids." Suppose that Jeremy had spoken to him and had seen Ridley's dislike of him jump into his face! Everyone in the school would know now—now that Parlow had spoken to him like that, and before them all!

He was walking furiously, he neither knew nor cared whither. His feet, obeying habit and custom, led him to the field beyond the school where you could see the sea. But he had no eyes for the trembling shadowy blue, no ear for its murmur.

He came abruptly to a stop. Like a shot out of a gun he felt it strike him: "Everyone in the school thinks I did that. What Parlow said everyone is thinking!"

The injustice of it was like a madness. Before, in his babyhood, it had been the same when they had accused him of stealing money that had not belonged to him. The injustice of that had seared him like a burn. So did this now.

Why, he had never been near the Dormouse! He had not this term touched a single Lower School boy! Anyone who knew him at all must realize that he had never bullied anybody! Ragging, just for the fun of it, but bullying, doing the things that Crumb and Baldock did!

His spirit grew black and bitter. Well, if that was the way people thought of him they could jolly

well think! He wasn't going to bother. He wouldn't care. He'd show them that if they thought he was like that he *was* like that! He'd go his way, his hand against every man's! He didn't want friends. He'd rather have enemies. Enemies! Yes, Staire, Staire was his enemy. It was Staire who had made people think these things. He'd get back on Staire, though; Staire would be sorry he'd ever made an enemy of him. If everyone thought him a cad he'd *be* a cad and Staire should feel the might of his caddishness.

But his thoughts, leaping and tossing now like the crest of an angry sea, swept on to Parlow. Parlow hated him. Parlow would never like him again. He would never see any more those books and those pictures, never hear Parlow talk about all the things that he liked, never feel again that warm friendliness that Parlow had given him so bountifully. He had liked Parlow awfully—oh, awfully! Parlow had been of Uncle Samuel's world, knowing all those things that Uncle Samuel knew.

Jeremy had not known until now how deeply he had counted on Parlow's friendship for the future, seeing it grow and grow so that as he, Jeremy, became older, he could understand better and better the things that Parlow wanted him to understand.

And now that was all finished, and finished in the unfairest way, so that the figure of Parlow was itself dimmed and spoilt. Parlow had been unfair, not asking about the truth or trying to discover it, not speaking to Jeremy first in private but charging

him falsely with dirty actions in public before all the world. Yes, Parlow would never be the same again.

He turned back to the school, kicking the turf with his feet as he went. Everything was over and for ever. All his life he would be known as the bully, the coward. Always for years and years it would be told at Crale how a small boy had run away because he, Jeremy Cole, had bullied him. There was to be no more happiness anywhere, no fun, no football, no anything. Everything was over. . . .

Reaching the school he felt what he had never in his life felt before, that he wanted to hide. Everyone was looking at him and talking about him. (Of course no one was either looking at nor talking about him.) Leeson's was blazing with sunlight and life. It was a quarter of an hour before dinner. The passages were filled with scurrying, shouting, hurrying tumult. He brushed like a ghost through that world. "Hullo, Stocky!" "I say, Stocky!" . . . He might have known from the sound of those voices that he was not cast out, that they still needed him, that nothing was changed. But he did not hear the voices. He went on, his head up, glaring about him.

He went, some subconscious instinct driving him, up to his dormitory. It was forbidden to go into the dormitories during the day, but no one saw him. The upstairs passages were deserted, his dormitory, when he entered it, flooded with sun and empty.

He went to his bed and sat down upon it. The white beds and the white washing-basins smiled

at him but he did not see them. The sea crept in and rumbled, rumbled at his feet.

He sat there, kicking his short legs. He had been publicly disgraced. The whole world thought him to be something that he was not.

Injustice. Injustice. Injustice. His spirit broke and, burying his face in his hands, he cried and cried like a small child lost.

CHAPTER XII

VISIT OF UNCLE SAMUEL

I

HE awoke next morning earlier than usual, before the clanging bell had broken his dreams, and with a dim sense that something awful had occurred. Then gradually it came to him and, as he lay there thinking, his face set obstinately. He was an outlaw and everyone hated him. Well, then, he'd be an outlaw. If they didn't want him they needn't have him. As for Parlow—but he didn't want to think about Parlow.

Then at breakfast time there was a letter from Uncle Samuel and with very surprising news in it.

For which reason (it began unexpectedly as his letters always did) I shall pay a call on you afternoon of Wednesday 16th. The *Reason* is that an old boy with a knobbly nose and two chins has decided that he would like me to make a picture of him. He saw "Cows" of mine in London and thinks that my pastoral style will exactly suit him.

Moreover he has the good sense to live not far from your place of education so that I can see you at three and leave you at five (as much as I can stand of you on end). Ask those in authority to free you for those hours. On Wednes-

day I believe you have a half holiday so all should be well. If you don't want to see me you've only got to say so. I know what it is to be stricken with relations in public.

Moreover I shall have green paint on both cheeks and be wearing my dirtiest overall so you'll be ashamed of me I warn you. It will be a good lesson for you however on how not to be a snob and I shall be very happy to watch you learn it. All here are well except that your sister Mary has spots which don't add to her beauty. Barbara is developing intelligence and a sloping chin. One will make up for the other. Now make ready for me—I'm no easy guest to entertain. I demand the best of everything and can be most unpleasant when I don't get it.

Your loving Uncle

SAMUEL.

Jeremy's emotions when he read this letter were of a curiously mixed kind.

Once again Uncle Samuel had stepped in at the very moment when he was needed. The very thought of his funny screwed-up face and common sense was a comfort. On the other hand, did Jeremy want him to appear just now at the school? Hadn't Uncle Samuel put his stubby finger as usual on the point when he hinted at Jeremy's snobbery?

What *was* snobbery? Staire was a snob because it mattered to him where people were born and whether they dropped their H's or no. Jeremy wasn't like that, but what he *was* like was to be made uncomfortable when he was in the company of someone who looked funny or did funny things. Was *that* snobbery? Because if so, then practically every fellow in the school was a snob. And naturally, too. Because a fellow's relations could say or do or look something that other fellows

would never forget. There was Cheepstow's mother, for instance, who came down last year wearing a hat like all the flowers of Paradise pressed together on to one small foundation of straw. Would Cheepstow ever be allowed to forget his mother's hat? Never! And hadn't it in some mysterious way led to Cheepstow himself being considered a bit of an ass? Awfully unfair, of course, but then, as Jumbo had very sapiently remarked, "A chap ought to warn his mother. . . ."

And then there had been Faithfull's father, who was an Archdeacon. Of course an Archdeacon has to wear an apron and gaiters—it's in the Church Law—but when a man is as fat and as short as Faithfull's father, it's a little unfortunate that *he* should be an Archdeacon! And then Faithfull himself being so long and skinny they made the oddest pair walking along Coulter's, especially from behind. . . .

These experiences and others like them were all in Jeremy's mind when he considered Uncle Samuel, as of course Uncle Samuel had known that they would be. Now, if Uncle Samuel arrived at the school in full view of everyone *in* his oldest clothes and with paint on his face (this was quite possible) *then* Jeremy would never hear the last of it. Did Jeremy love Uncle Samuel enough not to mind never hearing the last of it?

Yes, most surprisingly, he did! The discovery was so unexpected and yet so certain that on making it he was amazed. He hadn't known that he loved Uncle Samuel so much. Perhaps his special circumstances just at this moment made him cling

to his uncle more tightly than was normal. Perhaps not. It seemed improbable that his feelings about Uncle Samuel went up and down. They had always been so exactly the same.

So he wrote his uncle a letter :

DEAR UNCLE SAMUEL,

It will be ripping your coming. I'll tell Leeson about it and when you arrive you have to go to the Camel's house it's got red creeper like mange all over it and ask for me and they'll put you in the study and I'll be sent for. I've been playing footer for the second which is sickening and I'll be jolly glad to see you give my love to father and mother and Helen and Mary and Barbara.

From your loving nephew

JEREMY.

2

When Wednesday 16th arrived it was a fine day, which was a good thing. What wasn't a good thing was that Jeremy was down for a House practice game and he had to go to Llewellyn, the House Captain, and ask to be excused.

This he hated to do.

Llewellyn was a little as Jeremy might be, three years from now, broad in the back, thick and short in the leg. He'd had his nose broken, boxing. He was known to be amiable except when roused ; then he was a perfect devil. He had no influence in the House at all, because he cared for nothing but football, boxing, his dogs at home and his friend Corner, who shared a Study with him. Corner was the exact opposite of Llewellyn, being slender, wistful and musical. Rather like a girl,

and known as Alice by his enemies. Llewellyn adored him and thought everything that he did wonderful.

When Jeremy went into his Study Llewellyn was having his chest rubbed by a small and perspiring fag. He grunted at Jeremy. Jeremy made his request.

"Getting rather slack at footer, aren't you?" Llewellyn snorted.

"Just the opposite," said Jeremy.

Llewellyn brushed the fag aside like a fly and stood up, puffing out his chest and smacking it. "If you weren't so slack you'd be playing for the First."

Jeremy, very sensitive just now, saw an insult in everything. So he said nothing but stood and glared.

Llewellyn appeared to like this because he suddenly laughed.

"All right," he said. "It ain't my fault. You're a darned good scrum-half, as I'm always telling them. If I let you off to-day you've got to be there on Saturday. The House matches aren't so far off."

"Thanks," Jeremy said, in an off-handed way. Then, in spite of himself, he laughed too. He didn't know why. Llewellyn looked so funny, rubbing his chest with such care and preoccupation. He looked nicer with a broken nose somehow. That laugh was the beginning of rather an important friendship.

And of course he had to see Leeson. Leeson also had something to say. "Cole, Mr. Parlow

tells me you're not working as well as you did; you're slacking off."

Jeremy, looking like a mule with his legs planted wide, answered nothing.

"Well?" asked Leeson, irritated.

"I'm not slacking," he said at last.

"Having this Study seems to do you no good," Leeson went on. "I can't think what happens to you boys when you get a Study. It goes to your heads, or something. You've got to pull up during the rest of the term, Cole, or steps will have to be taken."

Jeremy stood there scowling.

"I don't know whether I'm right to let you go out with your uncle. I'm not at all sure that you deserve it."

Jeremy's expression was, "Please yourself. I don't care."

"However, as your uncle is coming all this way and it's only for an hour or two——"

Jeremy went.

Yes, the world was his enemy and through no fault of his own. He hated everybody and everything. However, when he saw Uncle Samuel standing there on the middle of the Camel's purple carpet he was delighted. He couldn't help himself. That curious bond that there was between himself and his uncle was simply too much for him. He wouldn't have minded if his uncle had kissed him, which, of course, Uncle Samuel would never think of doing.

The Camel, too, was very decent. Jeremy encountered him so seldom that a meeting with

him was rather like a meeting with God. But, God-like or no, he knew all about boys. He unwound his strange serpentine legs and talked about football, sea-bathing, ski-ing in Switzerland and a ridiculous time he'd once had when he lost his way on the Underground—and all this as though he were himself deeply interested and was not merely making conversation. Moreover, he made you feel that it was *you* that he liked talking to, you, Jeremy Cole, and that he hadn't had such fun for weeks. It didn't last very long, but Jeremy went away with his uncle, ready to die for his Head Master.

Moreover, the fates be praised, Uncle Samuel didn't look in the least bit odd. He hadn't paint on his face and his old grey suit was a perfectly sensible one. Of course, he *was* a funny shape and his voice was different from any other voice, husky with a crack in it, but there was nothing in his outward appearance that any boy need mind.

They went away together.

The afternoon light was silver over sea and land. The sky was ribbed with clouds, lying in pale, saffron ridges on a surface that was almost white. Trees and buildings caught the colour from an invisible sun and trembled on the verge of rosy splendour that was delaying for the sunset. It was one of those autumn afternoons yet early, but preparing, it seemed, for some gorgeous display —as though at the striking of some hour the curtain would be rung up and then—what wouldn't you see? England is always preparing for such displays, but over and over again Nature decides that the performance is not quite ready.

"It's your two hours," said Uncle Samuel. "You shall do whatever you please."

"Let's go down to the beach," said Jeremy, "and then have tea at Mrs. Grafton's."

"Who's Mrs. Grafton?" asked Uncle Samuel.

"She has a shop for teas in the village," said Jeremy. "She's out of bounds, except you're with your people. Mulling Minor took me and Jumbo there when his aunt came."

"Was it a good tea?" asked Uncle Samuel.

"The tea was frightfully decent but Mulling's aunt was awful."

"Well, how are you?" asked Uncle Samuel, after a while. "You seem pretty fair."

"Oh, I'm all right," said Jeremy.

"So there's something the matter?" Uncle Samuel asked, at once detecting trouble.

"I'm all right," said Jeremy again. The time was not yet. So Uncle Samuel, instantly perceiving this, began in his odd, jumbled fashion to talk of his own affairs and, as always, he spoke to Jeremy as though he were of his own age and generation.

"You see, it isn't right for me to go on living on your father any longer. Of course I pay him something, and your mother finds it a help with the house-keeping, but I don't pay as much as I'd be paying somewhere else. Up to now I haven't had it, but lately I've been making some money."

"How much?" asked Jeremy, keenly interested.

"Oh, I don't know. A pound or two. And I'm going to make more. You see they're beginning to like my pictures."

"Who's they?" asked Jeremy.

"Oh, people in London and Paris."

"Aren't you surprised?" asked Jeremy.

"Not very. Tastes change. I was a little ahead of my time. Soon I'll be behind it."

"Chaps here," said Jeremy, "don't like that picture of yours I've got, a bit—the one with the purple sheep."

"You hang on to it, my boy. That'll be worth some money some day."

Jeremy did not reply. He didn't agree with his uncle, but, young though he was, he knew that artists had their own ideas about their work and that it wasn't wise to disabuse them.

"It will be awful if you go away. I shall never see you."

"Yes, you will."

"Where will you go?"

"Paris, perhaps. You must come and stay with me there."

Here was excitement! Paris! As though one said the North Pole. "Oh, that would be ripping! People eat frogs there, and snails. Staire says he knows it backwards. I bet he doesn't. He's an awful swankpot."

"The trouble is," went on Uncle Samuel, "I'm rather old to move and I'm frightfully lazy. Not about my work but moving anywhere. If I weren't I'd have moved years ago."

They were in complete harmony now, as though they had never been separated. Jeremy was not of course aware of it, but Uncle Samuel was wondering, as he had so often wondered before, why it was that he was more completely at his ease with

this small boy than with any other human being in the world.

They were approaching the sea. They went through a gate, then across a shelving field, past a ruined and deserted cottage, then over some dunes and so down on to a beach, marbled by the retreating tide.

The sea was far out, a stretch of silver. On every side of them the sand, mother-of-pearl beneath the faint dim sky, wandered to gentle horizons.

"Let's sit here," said Uncle Samuel, suddenly sinking down on to the edge of the dune. He lay back, his stomach like a round cushion, his legs like bolsters. He looked up at the sky.

"Now then, how are things?" he asked.

Jeremy sat pressed up against him and dug in the sand with his heels.

"Everything's rotten," he said.

"How's that?"

"I don't know. It ought to have been all right. I expected I'd have a ripping term but it's all gone wrong."

"Who's fault?" asked Uncle Samuel.

"It isn't mine, anyway. I haven't done anything that I can see. There's a chap I can't stick."

"What's his name?"

"Staire. We've always loathed each other. His father's something swell in the Diplomatists."

"Oh, I see. Well, how's he made things rotten?"

"Oh, every way. He's good at cricket but he's no good at football, so he hates me because there isn't any cricket this term; and chaps that are

friends of his have been bullying kids in the Lower School, and then one new kid ran away and when he was brought back they said I'd been bullying him."

"Well, had you?"

"Of course I hadn't. I'd hardly spoken to him ever. Anyway, there've been rows all the term, and they say it's my fault and Leeson's been jawing me and says he'll take my Study away if I'm not careful. And now Parlow's sick with me, too."

"Who's Parlow?"

"He's my form master. He was frightfully decent to me all the first part of the term, so it makes it worse. And they're only playing me for the Second."

There was a suspicious gulp in Jeremy's voice. Uncle Samuel knew that things were in a very bad way indeed. He put his arm round the boy, but only, as it were, by chance and not as a demonstration. But Jeremy did not draw away as he would have done had it been anyone else.

"Who was this boy who ran away and where did he run to?"

"He's a boy called Morgan. I don't know where he ran to. He was away a whole night. He's popular, now, because he didn't split on anyone. It isn't fair, because I never touched him. It's only Staire who told lies to everyone."

Uncle Samuel thought a moment. Then he said, "Have you been showing off because you've got a Study?"

Jeremy turned on to him a puckered and disturbed face. "No, I don't think so. I'm just the same."

"When we get a step up people always think we're showing side, whether we are or not. Then probably we do, just to show them. If he's been telling lies why don't you have it out with this boy Staire, or whatever his name is?"

"So I would," said Jeremy eagerly, "only I didn't want to have a row this term, just after getting my Study. That's why it's so rotten."

"Ever been unpopular before?" asked Uncle Samuel.

"What do you mean—unpopular?"

"Everyone disliking you, thinking you do everything for the worst reasons, wanting you to do them for the worst reasons."

"No," said Jeremy. "I suppose I haven't. I've never thought about it. I just used to rag about."

"I see," said Uncle Samuel, pulling his fat chin, as was his custom when he was thinking. "What's the other fellow like, the fellow you hate?"

"Staire? Oh, I don't know. Awfully sidey. Thinks his skin's different from everyone else's. He's jolly good at cricket but he's no use at anything else."

"Well," said Uncle Samuel. "If you weren't yourself, if you were some third person and saw yourself and this Staire, which would you like best —without prejudice?"

Jeremy, who always took Uncle Samuel's points very quickly—they were the kind of points that he would like to make himself, if he were clever enough —honestly tried to consider this, saw himself as Jimmy Smith, benignly considering an impersonal

Cole, an abstract Staire. Funny, when you looked at it this way, how differently you yourself appeared!

"I suppose," he said at last, slowly, "that if I didn't know either of them, well, I'd like Staire best. He's better looking and knows more things. But honestly, I think I'm better to be with *much*."

Uncle Samuel laughed and drew his knees up into his stomach.

"There you are. That settles it. All your life there will only be a few people who have time to know you *well*. The general view will be the one the crowd takes, the superficial one. You haven't got to pay any attention to that, *ever*. Only two things for you to listen to. Your judgment of yourself, and you've got to make that as honest as you can. Don't be biased in your own favour, if you can help it. Don't be too much down on yourself, either. And otherwise, listen to the two or three people who really love you. You'll be lucky if you have so many. If *they* think there's something wrong with you, then pay attention—it's serious. But the *crowd*—Lord! the crowd! They're *always* wrong. Or no," he corrected himself. "Not always. There's *something* in their idea of you, but not enough for you to worry over as long as you've kept your self-respect and the respect of two or three who know you." Then he lay back and beating his hands on his stomach murmured:

Hey diddle diddle,
The Cat and the Fiddle,
The Cow jumped over
the Moon——

He looked out over the sand, over whose mysterious pools shadows of rose and amber were now softly stealing. "There's one glory of the Sun and one of the Moon. The Stars blaze in their confident splendour and the sands of the sea shall be glorified. . . . Well, it won't do you any harm to be unpopular for a bit. But fight that chap, if he's telling lies about you."

They were silent for a while, then Jeremy said:

"There's another thing, Uncle Samuel. You know Jumbo. I've told you about him before. He's always been my best friend. I can't talk to him any more."

"What do you mean—you can't talk to him?"

"I don't seem to want to tell him things, like I used to. It was all right when we just ragged about, but now there are other things—all sorts—and he doesn't know what I mean. . . . He wants everything to be as it was—and it isn't."

"Oh, I see," said Uncle Samuel. "Is there anybody else?"

"Not exactly. At least there's a chap called Ridley. He's in the Sixth. I've never spoken to him in my life. I don't think he even knows my name. But I'd do anything for him, I would really. I know it sounds silly. I don't know why I feel like that. It's the way he looks or something. . . ."

Jeremy stopped, awkward and embarrassed. How was he ever to make anyone understand? Uncle Samuel sat up. He stared out to sea, frowning.

"This boy—he's in the Sixth, is he? Sure he hasn't spoken to you or looked at you or anything?"

"No. He doesn't know I'm there, even."

"Because friendship with a boy so much older —do you think it's wise?"

"He isn't so much older," Jeremy answered. He was looking into his uncle's face so honestly and with eyes so frank and clear-sighted that there was nothing to fear. "He's much cleverer—that's all. He's quiet, you never see him about with anyone else. I'd like him to be my friend. I sort of feel one day he will be." The boy sighed.

"But it's rotten dropping Jumbo, when we've been friends so long, isn't it? Only I've changed;—I don't want the same things as I did I: don't want always to be ragging around—and he hasn't."

"That's all right," Uncle Samuel answered. "Friendship's like that. You aren't friends with someone only because you want to be. You can't have a friend unless you can feed one another. Once or twice in your life you'll meet someone and you'll go on with them for the rest of your days. Finer and finer it is. But for the rest—those you meet on a journey—be grateful for the times you've had together, let it go when it's over, bear no grudges, above all don't prolong it falsely. No one knows at the start what a friendship's going to be. Don't hang on and be false. Life's all movement, or ought to be. Don't be sentimental over reminiscences and don't charge others with falseness. On the whole, you'll be treated as you deserve."

Uncle Samuel yawned. "I get perilously like your dear father, at times. I suppose it's living with him so long. The sad sea waves are creeping into my bones. Now, what about tea?"

Jeremy scratched himself like a little dog and

jumped up. A great burden had fallen from him. Why? His Uncle's lazy words, the sky now scattered with little crimson feathers, the long stretch of misted sands, the sleepy murmur of a friendly sea, the smell of the sea-pinks, the stiff sand grass, the flavour in his nostrils of sheep and wind and salt. Like a young goat he skipped away.

Having had their talk they were now, both of them, very happy and noticed everything that came their way; the gulls perched like white snowballs on the red-brown soil, the bare lift of the green hill against the rosy sky, the girl with two pigs who passed them as they struck into the path, and an old man standing in the dip of the green hil and calling something again and again. He'd lost his dog, maybe, but there was no dog in sight and no sound but the purring of the sea and the grunting of the two pigs.

"And it isn't," said Uncle Samuel, sitting in Mrs. Grafton's cottage, "difficult to live a life like this. I'd sleep late in the morning, have two brown eggs and a rasher of bacon for my breakfast, take my paints with me and go for a bathe, read a bit of a newspaper or the story in 'Home Chat,' have a snooze—my head in the warm sand—and so come back when the lights are being lit and the woman of the house is ready for some talk. A fine life for a man of my age!"

And it was a fine tea—Jeremy had never seen a finer. There were brown eggs and rashers of bacon, scones and a square of yellow butter with a cow stamped on it, blackberry jam and Cornish cream, a heavy cake thick with currants, saffron

buns and watercress—and a black teapot as big as a man's head.

Around the room there were pictures of ships, and there was a fine group of wax fruit under glass, a canary in a cage, and enormous photographs of Mrs. Grafton's father and mother, the fire leaping in the fireplace, and Mrs. Grafton herself with any amount to say.

But best, far best, was Uncle Samuel himself, all bunched up beside the table, like a wise old bird, his hair on end, his cheeks round and rosy, his eyes sparkling as they always did when he was happy, talking with his mouth full, banging the table with his fists.

What did he talk of? Shells and fireworks, leprechauns and daffodils, landladies' bills and the mistakes undertakers make over funerals, the Tower of London and Lady Jane Grey, pirates and their bloody ways, painting people upside down when they don't know you're looking at them, kings who keep their crowns in hat boxes and the man who went to the North Pole and found a bag full of diamonds.

Time to catch his train. Jeremy walked with him along the dusky road to the little station. At the last, just before Uncle Samuel stepped up into the close, stuffy little carriage, he took his hat off and sniffed the air, then—because the platform was dim and there was no one to see—he caught Jeremy and held him and kissed him. He had never kissed him in all their lives before. The train snorted away and Jeremy trudged up the hill to school.

CHAPTER XIII

THE UPPER TEN—AND THE LOWER FIVE

I

JEREMY returned another man. He had not yet reached the status of self-analysis so he did not worry himself as to why he felt differently. He did not think about it at all. He was happy again.

But he was happy, now, with a strange mixture of aloofness in his happiness. He did not seem to mind any longer what other people thought of him. Uncle Samuel had, in some strange fashion, given him wider horizons. There was the world outside the school—not only the world of his home and Polchester but the world of London and even of Paris—Paris where they bought Uncle Samuel's strange pictures and ate frogs.

Nevertheless, this own immediate world with Staire in the middle of it became, through the talk with Uncle Samuel, increasingly dramatic. Something was going to happen and that soon. Uncle Samuel had advised that the matter should be settled and it was *going* to be settled !

The first sign of his renewed vigour was his exceedingly abrupt treatment of Gauntlet.

Gauntlet, coming into the Study, smiling his polite smile, said :

" Well, where have you been all the afternoon ? "

" With my uncle," Jeremy answered shortly.

" Oh well, you needn't be shirty about it. There was a house practice on."

" I know."

" Didn't they kick up a row about your not playing ? "

" Llewellyn let me off."

" Oh . . . Staire and I went down specially to see you play."

" It was a loss for you, wasn't it ? Where's my French grammar ? You've boned it, Gauntlet. You're always pinching my books."

" No, I haven't. I'll lend you mine, if you like."

" I don't want your dirty book."

Gauntlet smiled—a maddening smile to Jeremy. It implied superiority in social status, wisdom and self-control. It also implied secret knowledge and the general opinion of an invisible world that Jeremy Cole was a blithering young ass.

Enraged by this smile Jeremy advanced so close to Gauntlet that waistcoat buttons were touching.

He then declared himself as follows :

" Look here, Gauntlet, don't you flatter yourself that I don't know the dirty game you've been playing this term, pretending to be my friend and talking against me all the time behind my back, with Staire and Baldock and the others. You're

a dirty sneak, that's what you are ; and at the end of the term either you move out of this Study or I do. I'm not afraid of you or of Staire either. I know all the dirty lies your lot have been spreading about me and the Dormouse, and you know jolly well I never touched the kid. I know you've tried to spoil me with everyone, but you haven't succeeded and you won't, either. And if I have any more of your cheek you'll know it. And you can tell Staire from me that he'll hear from me one of these days and jolly soon too."

After this he sat down to his French Grammar and Gauntlet, sniffing defiance, left the room.

2

The next thing that happened was the House practice on Saturday and the game, unimportant though it was in itself, had important consequences.

Jeremy, secure as he was, without possible rival, for his place as scrum-half in the House Team, had been taking these practice games very lightly. But now, because he had been playing for the Second and because Llewellyn had been decent about letting him off the other day, he determined to play his very best. And he did.

It was a day on which there happened to be no other very important games, therefore there were quite a number of spectators behind the ropes. Then Llewellyn had arranged that to balance the teams the best forwards should play the best backs. The result of this was that Jeremy had in front of him a set of forwards who would have disgraced

Falstaff's recruiting squad. A more miserable lot of screwy, mangy, knock-kneed, back-bent and lily-livered warriors Jeremy had never in all his life seen. As a pack they would be driven all over the field! As everyone knows, half-backs, however brilliant they may be, have little chance behind a hopelessly beaten pack. But this afternoon, strangely enough, the opposite of the apparently inevitable occurred.

Whether it was that sheer terror drove them to mighty deeds or that having nothing to lose in reputation they flung all caution to the sea breezes or whether, as Jeremy himself (not as a rule conceited) felt, that he fired them with a kind of divine frenzy, the fact is that they played as never in their little lives before and gave Llewellyn twice the problem in choosing his House Pack that he would normally have had.

It may be that Jeremy did, indeed, have something to do with this. In after-days, looking back with all his later International glories thick upon him, he was inclined to wonder whether he ever again played such a game as this. The new self-confidence that Uncle Samuel had given him, the sense that he had nothing to lose, the knowledge that Llewellyn, a member of the School First, was there watching him and would report, certain things that during the last weeks Steevens had taught him, all these factors contributed.

He played, indeed, that day a game that was, at any rate thirty years ago, a new game among schoolboys, a far more open game, not contenting himself merely with going down to the scrums

and getting the ball out to his fellow half, but opening the game out for the three-quarters by his own breaks through, and, in fact, in the last ten minutes of the game scoring himself two tries.

In any case, whether orthodox or no, it was a glorious afternoon. He was conscious of nothing save the rapture and ecstasy of the play. He seemed to know exactly where the ball would be long before the ball itself knew. He was unaware of kicks or bruises, pains or penalties. His body seemed to be made of some divine ether, an immortal body such as only the gods in Olympus know. Excited though he was, his brain was cool and clear, his eyes everywhere at once, his short legs of iron and yet swift about the ground, his hands so safe that no ball was too difficult to take. Such divine days come but seldom in a lifetime, but when they are there, how inevitable and right they seem! Why should it not be always like this? How simple and natural! What child's play! What heavenly ease and ecstatic natural rhythm! Alas, the gods are jealous, and allow us such joys only to snatch them abruptly from us and prove to us the mere mortals that we are!

> . . . So fell Ilium
> and the mystic towers
> of the immortal Gods! . . .

At half time, sucking a lemon, there was more drama for him. Parlow was there behind the ropes, watching the game! But just now even Parlow seemed unimportant—a stout, red-faced man like other red-faced men!

Those two tries at the end were worth a lifetime! The first was scarcely intended. He had snatched the ball from the feet of the scrambling forwards, had looked for Ewart, the other half, failed to find him, and had dashed through on his own. Finding himself behind the goal line he had planted the ball there!

On the second occasion, only a minute before Time, seized by some kind of Demon he had run three-quarters of the field, easily eluded the stumbling back and trotted behind the goal posts at his ease!

There was glory for you! But had it been right? Ought scrum-halves to be doing the work of three-quarters? In such a game it scarcely mattered; nevertheless as, covered with mud (the field had in the last quarter been a morass) he left the ground, he had a secret blinding vision of the possibilities that opening the game might mean!

Climbing the hill he almost ran into Parlow. He fancied that the master wanted to speak to him, but he swerved, pretended that there was mud in his eye, and, his head up, went on his way. Silly, but it gave him pleasure!

Then, as he crossed Coulter's, he found Llewellyn at his side:

"When you've changed like to come in and have some tea?"

"Thanks awfully!"

Yes, things were moving. . . .

3

As he was having his shower in the changing room and shrieking repartees, more or less brilliant, to various friends, Leeson walked through. He stopped by Jeremy, who was maidenly conscious of his nudity and then reassured—" It isn't anything funny to him seeing anyone stripped."

" Well, Cole," said Leeson (and before everyone too). " That was like your old style again. Fine game."

Jeremy grinned and then choked because the water tumbled down his throat.

" Get any bruises ? " Leeson asked, looking at his brown stocky body.

" No, sir."

" Good. I see you're down for the First Match against Odell's, next Wednesday."

Oh, was he ? Splendid ! He could have hugged Leeson.

" Play as you did to-day and you'll keep your place."

" Thank you, sir."

Leeson passed on and there was a shrill chorus of : " Good for you, Stocky. . . ." " Ripping game ! " " You give Odell's socks ! "

Then, to complete his happiness, Jumbo came in. He pretended to be looking for no one in particular but Jeremy knew that he was, in reality, looking for him—and, suddenly, all the restraint that there had been between himself and Jumbo during the last weeks had vanished ; they were just as they used to be, and Jeremy knew, as he looked at his

chubby, ugly, rather stupid face that he liked him better than anyone else in the world—except of course Uncle Samuel and, well, Ridley . . . but could you be fond of a boy to whom you had never even spoken ?

Jumbo had been present at the game and was, of course, bursting with pride about it, but was he going to say so ? Not he.

" Not bad for a kid," he said. " But the Stripes were rotten. Anyone could have run through them."

" Bet you couldn't." Jeremy was struggling with his collar and his face was purple, his words strangled.

" Bet I could, if they'd play me." There was a chorus of derisive laughter from the crowd upon whom Jeremy, hotly defending his friend, turned.

" All right. Jumbo plays better footer than any of you do."

They walked away together, arm in arm.

" Come and have tea," said Jumbo. " I've got a cake."

Jeremy felt a criminal.

" Oh, isn't it rot ? I can't. Llewellyn's asked me."

Llewellyn ! Jumbo, like many another humble friend of the rising great, had to check both soreness and jealousy. He succeeded manfully. " I say ! Fancy Llewellyn asking you ! "

" It's only because of the football," Jeremy explained airily. He was nicer, then, to Jumbo than he had ever been in all their days together before, trying to explain, without saying anything

about it, that all the Llewellyns in the world could be cast into the depths of the sea for one small whim of Jumbo's.

And Jumbo felt this and went away comforted.

Llewellyn's study showed on every side evidences of the æsthetic Corner. Instead of the mess that most studies offered you, everything here was of extreme tidiness. The walls were a pale cream, there were some etchings in dark frames (although Jeremy had not at that time the slightest idea of what an etching might be), there was a white bookcase that held books with gleaming bindings, and there was a rough, white bowl filled with amber-coloured chrysanthemums.

In the midst of this refinement the large, clumsy and broken-nosed Llewellyn looked a little out of place, but everyone knew that what Corner wished was law. Of Corner Jeremy was frankly terrified. He looked so remote and superior and elegant—not with Staire's elegance. He was not, as Jeremy, in spite of his tender years, thoroughly recognized, trying to impress anybody. He was simply himself—and his aloofness was majestic.

A very small fag was making tea. Llewellyn greeted him with his accustomed lazy roar.

"Hullo, Cole! Come along in! Take a pew. Damned good game of yours to-day."

Jeremy sat down. He had never been invited by a Prefect to tea before, indeed it was but a short while since he had been even as that small fag making the tea, and making it badly at that.

"What did you think of the game?" Llewellyn magnificently asked him. Jeremy, endeavouring to

meet Llewellyn on his own high ground, intimated that in his opinion the forwards on his side were better than might have been expected.

"They damned well were," Llewellyn answered. "I couldn't believe my eyes. Rabbits like Forster and Lewdo and Munnings and Frankau stuck it like anything. You got them all going. Oh yes, you did. No doubt of it. . . . Have some jam. . . . Blast your eyes (this to the fag), do you call this tea? The water wasn't boiling."

The fag, who was some two feet in height, his face crimson with bending over the fire, but no alarm in his soul, because he knew his Llewellyn, blamed the kettle.

"You see," Llewellyn amiably continued, "you get a damned good pair of halves and the game's half won. That's what I'm always telling them. If they'd stick to you and Steevens for the school halves all the term, instead of all this chopping and changing, then we'd know where we are. What the hell does it matter if a man has an off-day? Everyone has an off-day, sometimes. They're playing you on Wednesday, though."

Jeremy modestly acknowledged the honour.

"Well, you play your damnedest. Odell's are no class. We ought to beat them easy."

"Yes," replied Jeremy, as grown-up as he could muster.

He was conscious, desperately, of Corner, who sat there taking, it seemed, no interest in the conversation, his long, thin body lying back in the chair, eating bread and jam, his eyes on the ceiling.

Llewellyn was thoroughly accustomed to his friend's indifference, so, sitting on the table that creaked beneath him and swinging his big legs, he held forth :

" You know I'm keener on the House Team than the School this year. Don't tell anyone I said so, but all the same, we've got a good chance of winning the cup." He dropped his voice. " You know what it is, young Cole ; the House wants bucking up and it would do it no end of good to win the Rugger Cup. Things haven't been going too well this term, what with that kid running away and all. We're a pretty slack lot at the top of the House. I'm as bad as any—and there's got to be a change. It's all very well lamming chaps' backsides for being late for games, but what's that compared with all the row going on in Lower School, and chaps like you and Staire quarrelling ? Mind you, I haven't asked you in to tea just to jaw you. That would be a rotten trick. But I reckon that in another year's time you and Staire are going to be two of the most important fellers in the House, and you ought to be thinking of that. What's all the row about, anyway ? "

Jeremy looked Llewellyn in the face. He liked him. He could tell him just how things were. He did. He explained that he and Staire " couldn't stick one another and never would ; " that he hadn't wanted a " row " and had done everything possible to keep out of one ; that in all probability it wasn't so much Staire's responsibility as that of his followers, Crumb and Baldock ; and that anyway he hadn't had anything to do with the flight of the

Dormouse, whom he had never touched and had scarcely spoken to.

"Yes, that's all right," said Llewellyn, rather awkwardly. "I don't want to preach and Lord knows I don't mean to, but you and Staire are just beginning to be important in the House and the House means more than your private feelings. Oh, I'm a fine one to talk, I am, when I've just slacked around and played Rugger and never done anything for the House to speak of; but I've only got a year left now, and I'm damned sorry I've mucked up my time so. I can look back and see the mistakes I've made. That's why I'm telling you. You'll be a swell at Rugger next year and be having a first-class time and it will be damned easy to slack, just as I've done. But you shouldn't. You'll be sorry if you do. See what I mean?"

"Yes," said Jeremy. He saw.

"Why don't you and Staire have a scrap? Chaps always feel better after a scrap."

Jeremy nodded his head eagerly. "It's a jolly good idea," he said.

"Staire's not a funk, is he?"

"Rather not."

"Well, you have a scrap and I'll see that Leeson doesn't interfere."

Into the middle of this bellicose conversation came the languid, lazy voice of Corner.

"You've got an uncle who's a painter, haven't you?" he asked.

"Yes," said Jeremy.

"What does he paint?"

"Oh, sheep mostly—sheep and trees."

"I'd like to see one of his paintings."

"I've got one I could show you," said Jeremy.

"Bring it along some time."

It was time to go. An important thing had happened during this half hour, something of much greater importance than his talks with Leeson. Llewellyn had accepted him as a friend, had told him, brought him into his world and made him a citizen there. The House and her fortunes were something real to him, as they had never been before. And then, coming out of Llewellyn's Study he did a funny thing. He reacted in precisely the opposite direction. Obeying some impulse that he didn't at the time understand he turned down the passage into the Lower Common Room.

He had scarcely been there during the term and when he had been it was to look for somebody, just to push his head inside and go away again.

But now he wanted to go back as one of themselves. He wanted to prove to himself, perhaps, that he didn't, as yet, belong to Llewellyn and his friends, or, still further, to show, under the influence of Uncle Samuel's wider horizon, that he belonged to nobody, that he was a free citizen of all the world.

He felt embarrassment as he entered. The long room was filled with boys, even as he had always remembered it. It was like a camp of warriors in one of their off-hours—boys reading, boys ragging, boys quarrelling, boys writing letters, their chins dug into the paper, boys in a solid group round the fire discussing some matter with the grave faces of old men, boys standing on their heads, boys lying

flat on their backs on the dusty floor for no apparent reason at all, boys shouting meaninglessly, as though they must let the air out of their lungs, boys fat and thin and tall and short, and over them all and through them and under them a babel of noise, of shrieks and yells and screams . . . the infants of Leeson's Lower School disporting themselves.

No one, at first, paid Jeremy much attention. He had come in searching for somebody or something and would presently go away again. He didn't belong to them any longer. To the new boys of that term he was already like a visitant from another planet.

In his own heart he was loving the racket and rough-and-tumble. Only a short while back he had been a leader of it all, understanding its moods and sensations, pulling it, unconsciously, first this way and that, happy as a young animal, taking no thought for the morrow, living entirely in the moment.

He would like to be back there again, as only a few months ago he had been. But he knew that he could not. He had moved on.

He joined the crowd by the fireplace. "Hullo, Saunders," he said. "Hullo, McCanlis!" To the boys of that period the immediate event was the thing, and the immediate event just then in regard to Stocky Cole was the game that he had played that afternoon in the House Practice. Those that had not witnessed it had heard of it.

Way was made for him by the fire and two minutes later he was talking away as though he had never left the Lower School. The atmosphere settled

about him like a magic spell, the crackle of the fire, the old black beams of the fireplace with all the names scratched on to the wood, his own among the others, the noise on every side of him, the cosiness and warmth and happiness. He was happy as a king.

They very soon forgot that he was not one of themselves and continued their discussion, which was around the old, old question as to whether the Lower School was treated with proper respect or no. And as had so often been the case before, the general conclusion was—that it wasn't.

Saunders, a long and lanky boy, with red hair, was the principal rebel and he had a great deal to say. Where would the school be without its Lower School ? Simply nowhere at all. Who supported all the games, turned out in force at the matches, cheered at the concerts ? The Lower School. Without the industrious and active fagging of the Lower School where would the Prefects be ? Why, nowhere at all. Moreover, where was the food for future heroes ? Where the sportsmen and brilliant brains of the future ? Where but in the Lower School ?

Suppose the Lower School were to leave in a body and troop off into the sea, never to be in evidence again—would not the School tumble utterly to pieces ? Of course it would.

But was the School, in general, sufficiently aware of these undoubted facts ? It was not. Did the School do anything for the Lower School, grant it special privileges or show it unexpected favours ? Never ! On the contrary the Lower School was

crushed, inhibited, stamped upon, deprived of its energy and vigour (the noise at that moment in the room might to an unprejudiced observer seem to give the lie to this statement). What then was to be done about it ? What steps should be taken ? Who would try to raise up the Lower School to the place where it ought to be ?

Saunders pausing for lack of breath, everyone joined in at once and it was quickly evident that there were two parties here and that they were bitterly at war with one another.

These two parties were, in fact, the two old ones of the Sheep and the Goats ; but, like many another feud in history, the original cause of the quarrel was forgotten (the private struggle between Staire and Cole had quite sunk into the background).

Unfortunately the dispute became almost instantly personal. Saunders, who inherited from his father, a member of Parliament, a gift of oratory, was considered by many present a little above himself and far too fond of the sound of his own voice, and of this he was at once informed. Who was he anyway, to lay down laws for the Lower School and speak as though he owned the place ? On which someone else retorted that he had as good a right as any dirty Goat anyway, and on this there followed a chorus of Baas and then on that an outburst of groans intended to represent the familiar cry of the goat. . . .

Someone pushed someone else, someone caught someone round the neck. A movement became general.

It was now that Jeremy perceived that he was

out of his element. A year ago, yes even six months back he would have joined in the fray with a hearty happiness. Now it seemed to him foolish and all about nothing. He slipped away from the fireplace. The rest of the room, attracted by the noise of the dispute, were hurrying towards the fire, shouting, scrambling over tables, sprawling over forms, laughing with the lust of battle.

No one noticed Jeremy. He had almost reached the door when a small boy tumbled into him.

"Hullo!" said Jeremy. "Look out!" Then he saw that it was the Dormouse, but the Dormouse very different from a week or two before, the Dormouse vociferous, Dormouse vociferans, Dormouse joyfully militant.

The Dormouse saw him and stopped dead. "Hullo!" he said sheepishly, colouring to the very roots of his fair hair.

The boys were, both of them, embarrassed.

"How are you getting on?" said Jeremy gruffly.

The Dormouse muttered something. He was staring at Jeremy with all his eyes.

"Pretty decent?" Jeremy asked.

"All right, thanks," said the Dormouse.

"Like it here now?"

"Oh, it's all right."

"Playing footer?"

"Yes."

"Where?"

(The Lower School games were such a scramble of minute boys tumbling hither and thither that to be clear as to which part of your job you

represented was often a problem—more perhaps for the onlooker than the participant.)

The Dormouse was clear enough.

"Half-back," he said.

"Half-back! What, scrum-half?"

"Yes!"

"Oh Lord, I must come and see you play. I could give you some tips."

"Thanks awfully."

"Whose form are you in?" Jeremy painfully continued.

"Martin's."

"Is he decent?"

"Yes, thanks."

"Will you get your move?"

"I don't know."

There was a pause. The Dormouse was gazing as though, did he remove his eyes for a moment Jeremy would disappear.

"Everything's all right now then," Jeremy said at last.

"Yes, thanks."

He smiled. Decent kid. He'd like to give him a few tips about playing half-back. He . . .

He looked up and saw that Staire, Baldock at his side, was only a step away.

"Look at Stocky Cole making up to the small kids," Staire said, then moved on as though Jeremy were not there.

Wild furious hatred blazed in Jeremy's heart. It seemed to lift him off his feet with its sudden energy, carrying him mid-air.

He turned and hit Staire on the mouth.

"You beastly swine," he said. Staire turned.

"All right," Jeremy cried. "Will you fight?"

Staire, very white, nodded.

"Yes—you little cad."

Jeremy waited, then, as Staire made no further movement, nodded. He was breathless with a burning fiery rage.

"Behind Runners," he said, using the old traditional word.

Slowly he went out.

CHAPTER XIV

THE WAR OF THE SHEEP AND THE GOATS (III)

THE FIGHT

I

"BEHIND Runners!" How many times in old days the challenge was sounded in those two words? How many old Crale boys are there alive to-day, paunchy and rubicund and bald, spindle-shanked and bent and white-haired, judges and clergymen, soldiers and bank managers, crossing sweepers and poets, comedians and tragedians, tramps and gipsies, artists and misers, in whose ear were you to whisper those two words they would not sound like a trumpet echoing from a distant golden world?

To-day "Runners," that old corner of stone and rubble looking like nothing but a broken down Fives Court, with its splendid view clear out over field and wood and sea, is, I believe, no more, pulled down with much else to make way for grand laboratories and museums and what-not!

To-day also I believe the refined feelings and careful supervision of our twentieth-century civi-

lization looks on such exploits as barbarous and immoral. The worse for modern education say I!

How many ill-feelings and mean resentments and cowardly, sneaking treacheries did those scraps behind Runners blow to thin air! How many lingering feuds and half-baked grudges did that challenge of fists settle, once for all, never to be considered again! Ah, well! Other times other manners! Whether better or worse in this generation of anti-moralizing who dare say?

To many of us the name of Runners is enough for a recital of many another famous name! Clark *v.* Bostock, which went to sixteen rounds; Hunter *v.* McCormick, when Hunter was floored for eight and rose up to win the day; Russell *v.* Tempest, when two Houses joined in the final fray—eighty boys were engaged, thirty of whom had to go to the Infirmary; Sunter *v.* Glostock, when Glostock fought on and won after both his eyes had been closed.

Yes, Runners had seen some sights and is doubtless still telling tales in the ghostly world of bricks and mortar!

The traditions about the meetings were fast and firm and never to be varied as to referee, seconds, time and the rest. Time in the winter was 2.30 and in the summer five o'clock. The referee was appointed from another House than the combatants'; each boy chose two seconds. There was also a recorder, who entered all details of the fight in a large book. The Senior House Prefects of the boys concerned were always informed of the coming event. Only the boys of the Houses involved

were allowed to be present. The House Masters always knew of the affair, but it would have been considered the unforgivable breach of all Crale etiquette did a master intervene. Once, in the early 'nineties, a master had so intervened and it had never been forgiven him.

No Lower School boys were permitted the privilege of fighting.

2

Jeremy's own private feelings, now that the challenge was delivered, were mixed, as perhaps, if the truth were known, the feelings of all brave duellists since the world began have been mixed. He was relieved that the crisis had at length arrived and he hoped to issue from it with sufficient glory. During his time at Crale he had picked up some boxing from old Fox, the school sergeant, and, without being brilliant, had been adequate. He was plucky and enduring. He had, however, reason to believe that Staire was much more than this. The common rumour was that Staire was very fine indeed.

But of the actual fight Jeremy was not greatly afraid. He wasn't going to be disgraced, however finely Staire fought. What worried him was lest the authorities should scowl upon this adventure and so spoil his chance of First Fifteen Colours. Moreover there was something palpably ironic in this climax to his earnest endeavours to prove to the world that he was a peaceful citizen. He had gone back to Crale that term with the most virtuous intentions that any boy had ever resolved—he was

to be hard-working, peace-loving, a model of decorum. In actual truth this had been the stormiest term he had ever known at Crale and all, as it seemed to him, without any fault of his own. He hated Staire, of course, but he had been quite willing to let sleeping dogs lie. Only Staire was not a sleeping dog! The very sight of his supercilious face stirred the worst aggravations and hostilities in Jeremy—and it was to be feared that even a fight behind Runners was not going to cure that irritation!

A thing that he had not calculated upon nor known that it would oppress him was the pause.

The day of his challenge had been a Saturday; the fight was to be on Monday.

The news of it had, of course, become at once the whole House's property and the excitement about it was intense. There had been no official fight in Leeson's for two years, at least, and that alone would have given the event thrill enough; but here was the climax to a feud that had already, by reason of its dramatic incidents, stirred general attention.

Jeremy chose his backers—Jumbo and a boy called Caine—that Saturday evening and they, with solemn visage and most official mien, discussed details with Staire's backers, Baldock and a boy Mumpus. Forrester, a fellow of Haggard's House, well known for his fighting knowledge and sporting impartiality, was selected as referee.

Then it was that Jeremy passed into the oddest world of doubt and alarm and secret foreboding. His character had always known strange twists and turns that seemed not to belong to his stocky body

and his practical common sense. Again and again he had been aware of surroundings not seen with the naked eye, but more important than the visible ones. Before coming to Crale he had known mood after mood, when he had slipped away from all his natural interests and had started out on a search that was lonely and ill-defined but commanding and inevitable. The life of an English public school does not, as a rule, help the imaginative side of a boy's life, and during these three years at Crale Jeremy had been held too rigidly to a practical life to leave much room for an imaginative one; but often moments came, in the middle of school, of games, idle noisy ragging in the Lower School, when his attention would be held by some sound or passing colour or idle suggestion and he would stand lost, bewildered, as though he were a foreigner in a far land.

Now, although he was not frightened of this fight with Staire, he was conscious of a mood that translated the whole episode into something terrifying and ominous—not the fight itself but something beyond the fight and infinitely more important.

All Sunday he was bewildered, as though he were in a dream. And he *was* in a dream. Nothing was real to him—neither masters nor boys nor the Chapel services nor the walk that he had with Jumbo in the afternoon.

He tried to tell Jumbo something of this, but of course Jumbo didn't understand.

"Wouldn't it be funny," he said, as they stood out on the lank naked moor behind the school, "if, when I hit Staire, he wasn't there and there

was a big black nigger there instead, naked and shiny and tall as a tree ? "

" What rot you do talk," said Jumbo.

" No, but why should Staire be there ? Perhaps I'm not there either."

" Oh, stow it," said Jumbo uncomfortably. " You haven't talked like this for ages. What you've got to do is to give Staire one in the eye, so that he can't see straight. Then you've got him."

" Suppose I hit Staire," Jeremy went on, " and he turned into a rabbit and then he ran away and hid in my bed and bit me in the middle of the night." Jeremy himself laughed at this, but it didn't after all seem so impossible.

" Suppose," he went on, " everyone had two noses and only one eye. Why shouldn't they ? They might just as well."

" Oh rot—do shut up ! " said Jumbo.

" Suppose that small cloud came down and rolled down the road and got bigger and bigger and swallowed you up and then went back into the sky again, with you inside it. You would look a fool, wouldn't you ? "

" I don't know where you think of these things," said Jumbo angrily. " I wish you wouldn't. . . ."

" Suppose . . ." said Jeremy.

The matter was not passing without the attention of the authorities. Llewellyn went to see Leeson.

" There's going to be a fight on Monday, sir —Staire and Cole."

" Oh dear, it's come to that, has it ? "

" Yes, sir. Think it's a good thing, sir. Clear the air a bit ! "

"They've been scrapping all the term, haven't they?"

"Yes, sir."

"Pity. They're both decent boys and ought to mean a lot to the House later on."

"Yes, sir. That's why I think it's better for them to have a fight now."

"Do you, really? Do you think there's anything in that theory?"

"Sure of it, sir. Know from my own feelings."

"Well, I won't interfere. . . . What's your opinion of young Cole, Llewellyn?"

"I think he's a very decent kid, sir. Not like the ordinary kid. He's a jolly good footballer."

"Yes, when he likes. But there's something odd in him somewhere. He's not the ordinary boy, not by any means. Something in him sometimes secretive and reserved."

"Yes, sir?" Psychology was outside Llewellyn's territory—he left that to Corner.

"Well, I won't interfere," said Leeson.

But he went to see *his* chief; not to ask his opinion, because Daime always preferred his House Masters to settle such matters for themselves, but merely to tell him of it.

The Camel, his long legs stretched in front of him, was lying back, smoking a briar of enormous size and reading Shakespeare, "Henry IV, Part I."

"Listen to this, Leeson," he cried, his thin, bony features stirring with excitement and he read:

Why, Sir John, my face does you no harm.
No, I'll be sworn I make as good use of it as many a

man doth of a death's head or a momento mori. I never see thy face but I think upon hell-fire, and Dives that lived in purple; for there he is in his robes, burning, burning. If thou wert any way given to virtue, I would swear by thy face; my oath should be "By this fire, that's God's angel." But thou art altogether given over; and wert indeed, but for the light in thy face, the son of utter darkness, when thou rann'st up Gadhill in the night to catch my horse, if I did not think thou hadst been an ignis fatuus or a ball of wild-fire, there's no purchase in money. O, thou art a perpetual triumph, an everlasting bonfire-light. Thou hast saved me a thousand marks in links and torches, walking with thee in the night betwixt tavern and tavern; but the sack that thou hast drunk me would have bought me lights as good cheap at the dearest chandler's in Europe. I have maintained that salamander of yours with fire any time this two-and-twenty years; God reward me for it!

"Lord, there's genius, there's magnificence, there's God plenty—what do I bother with boys for? Why, in Heaven's name, don't I retire to a cottage in Cumberland, drink sack and live on Shakespeare and Hazlitt? Boys, boys. . . . Well, what's the matter? Not that I'm not glad to see you. Sit down somewhere and I'll read you some more. Have a drink. And they say Shakespeare was Bacon. Old Bacon write that kind of thing! Lord, the fools there are in the world. . . . Yes, and what's the matter?"

"Nothing's the matter," said Leeson. "I thought I'd look in on you. Oh yes—my Lower School is in a fine flutter of excitement about a fight arranged, I'm informed, between young Cole and Staire."

Daime put down his book and puffed at his pipe.

"A fight? What about?"

"They've been at loggerheads all the term. I remember we talked about Cole the other day."

"Yes. What's the trouble?"

"I don't know. A kind of Doctor Fell feeling, I fancy. My Lower boys have been upset all term over it. Young Morgan's escapade was connected with it."

"Well, if that's the way it is it won't do them any harm to have it out. Do the Prefects know about it?"

"Yes, it was Llewellyn who came and told me."

"They'll see there's no riot. We won't interfere."

And then they finished "Henry IV, Part I."

4

I won't pretend to compare this affair with the immortal combat between Bill Neate and the Gasman, but I fancy that had the mighty recorder of that great fight been present at this little one he might have found something fine to say about it. I wish that he had been there; his ghost may have been. I cannot but fancy that Hazlitt's spirit misses little of the sporting kind. What things he must have seen during the last hundred years! Even in these degenerate days there have been men of whom he must approve—the Dohertys and Wilding, big W.G. and little Jimmie Wilde, Davies and Kershaw, Hobbs and Macartney—his ghost is kept busy I warrant. . . .

This particular Monday was cold and windy, with a shivering suspicion of rain in the air, but by two of the clock the whole of Leeson's Lower School were there, behind Runners, keeping, although there were no ropes, mathematically outside the square dedicated by solemn tradition to the ceremony. By quarter past two there was a very honourable sprinkling of older boys also.

Over everything there was a hush. No one spoke above a whisper, because part of the tradition was that the fight was absolutely forbidden and did any authority know of it there would be terrible penalties for everyone—and this although the smallest boy present, possibly the Dormouse who, pressed in the forefront, was as deeply agitated as though he was himself to be one of the combatants—was aware absolutely that the authorities *did* know and were passing by on the other side.

So there was a deathly hush and through and over this the boom and splatter of the sea, stirred to fury by the wind, broke and thundered.

When the school clock in its crazy, hiccuppy fashion (they have a fine, solemn, sober clock nowadays) sounded the half hour the fighters were in the ring. It was tradition that only shorts, socks and running shoes were worn, so there was Jeremy, seated on a precarious kitchen chair, a great coat over his naked shoulders, and there opposite him, on a similar chair, was Staire, a great coat over *his* shoulders. A shivery business for both of them. Behind Jeremy, with towels and most serious expressions, were Jumbo and Caine. Behind Staire, Baldock and Mumpus. The most serious and

solemn by far, armed with a watch and a dinner bell, was the referee, Forrester, a scraggy, long-limbed boy who lived only for such events as these, and, so living, found life indeed worth while.

In those fine days there were no boxing-gloves and no feeble decision on points. You fought until you won or until your backers threw the sponge in for you or until the referee stopped the fight. The rounds were of two minutes each.

To put it on record that at this particular moment Jeremy felt happy would be to lie.

He was not a natural boxer, nor was he fond of fighting for fighting's sake. He could do fine things when in a rage, but although, at this moment, he disliked Staire as deeply and unrelentingly as it was in his power to dislike anyone, it was difficult at that chilly instant, with the cold wind blowing over your shoulders, to feel raging hatred and lust of revenge. He was worried, too, by the sea, which seemed both noisy and personal, as though, beating up to his very feet, it were shouting at him : " You know you can't box ! You know you can't box ! Bang ! Bang ! Bang ! "

And then behind the crowd, so serious and so silent, he had a strange sentimental picture of his father and mother and aunt and of his sisters Helen and Mary and Barbara, all tearfully imploring him to come away and not allow himself to be hurt.

However, the tinkle of the dinner-bell swept the family into limbo as he stepped across the grass, touched Staire's hand and—the fight was started !

They made almost as startling a contrast, facing one another, as did Bill Neate and the Gasman.

True, Jeremy was scarcely as Ajax " with Atlantean shoulders, fit to bear," but his brown arms and chest were thick and strong and he was sturdy enough on his short legs. Staire, on the other hand, was not unlike " Diomed, light, vigorous, elastic, and his back glistened in the sun, as he moved about like a panther's hide." No question which was the handsomer of the two.

No question either, I fear, as to the better fighter. From the first every movement of Staire's showed that he knew his job. Jeremy went in for him as though he would immediately annihilate him; but Staire stepped back, Jeremy missed his stroke, Staire turned, hit out with his right, tapped him on the cheek, stepped away again, tapped him on the other cheek, and all this while his fine supercilious face regarded his opponent scornfully, as though calling the crowd to witness how easy a thing he had here. And the crowd, brutal as always, was quick to detect the difference between the two, and at once was ready to mock Jeremy's clumsiness.

" Young Cole hasn't a chance," said some senior boy standing behind the Dormouse—and the Dormouse's heart was of lead.

So the first round ended with Staire's elegant and aristocratic hint of what he was going to do in another minute or two.

Back on his rickety chair, Jumbo and Caine, fanning him in the most professional manner, whispered him earnest advice. He was to go right in and finish it, get Staire silly before he knew where he was, go in and finish it. . . . They didn't say so, but Jeremy knew exactly what they meant,

and that was, if he didn't finish Staire very shortly, Staire would finish him.

Only too well he knew that to be so. He wouldn't allow himself to think, but the sea, tossing now at his very feet, was saying, "You're going to be whacked! You're going to be *whacked!* You're going to be WHACKED!"

Staire was better, yes far better, than he had expected. He had felt his own clumsiness a great deal more acutely than anyone in the crowd had felt it. Anyone who has gone into a fight and after the first round realized that his opponent is greatly his superior has felt exactly what Jeremy was feeling now. Oddly enough, also, this realization of Staire's superiority cooled some of his dislike. He *must* admire anyone who could box like that and he felt in the most curious fashion that he would like to be one of Staire's backers if he were fighting someone else.

Nevertheless, when the dinner bell sounded again he went in as determined as ever—in fact more determined than at first—to push in and win. He started off, this time, with a lucky one and a blissful feeling it was to know that he had stung Staire's nose and made the blood flow. Nice to feel the wet coolness of the blood on the broken skin of his knuckles. He heard someone call out, "Well hit Stocky!" and in a kind of glory he saw Uncle Samuel standing in a cloud, shouting approval. He had the sense, too, to move back after his lucky blow and for a moment or two they both withdrew glaring at one another. But now Jeremy realized his disadvantage in lack of height and shortness of

arm. It seemed to be impossible to get *at* Staire, and larrikinwise he was for ever mounting higher and higher. Staire darted in and stung Jeremy's cheek again. It hurt this time and Jeremy had an impulse to go rushing wildly, with his head forward as though he were a bull; but with a fearful effort of restraint he pulled himself up and stood on guard. But again Staire penetrated his defence, hitting him just above the left eye, and Jeremy's very wild return missed him.

Here the tinkle of the dinner bell most happily saved him. He got back to his chair, and now he was in a fearful rage. He couldn't hear a single thing that either Jumbo or Caine said to him. They'd *hurt*, those blows of Staire's, and now he must hurt back again. Somehow he must get at Staire and knock his face in. It didn't matter what happened to himself, but he must knock Staire's face into a pulp. All the most primitive savagery was aroused in him, and when the bell went for the third round he ran forward with no thought of anything but that he must knock Staire's face in.

The result of this was that his guard was down and he was met at once with a good straight blow between the eyes. The firmament was instantly crowded with gesticulating and jeering stars. He reeled and if Staire had hit him at once again he would have fallen, but Staire's next blow missed him. He had time to recover. The stars, like the Gadarene swine, swept down a steep place into the sea and the ground that had been rocking like a switchback under him steadied itself and belonged to his legs again. But he felt sick and bewildered,

as though someone had taken an unfair advantage of him. During the rest of that round he succeeded in getting Staire once more on the nose—the only portion of Staire's anatomy that he seemed able to touch, and he avoided being hit seriously again. But, as once more, he sank into his rickety chair he did feel that it was all over with him and he realized that Jumbo and Caine felt it too.

It was the first real fight of his life, and as every man of experience will tell you, that first fight needs some grit. What worried him, so far as he could think at all, was that he had forgotten every word that the old sergeant had ever told him. He couldn't remember a thing and the bump on his forehead seemed to be swelling into a gigantic size, as though he were carrying a mountain there. Worst of all he hadn't, during that round, seen Staire at all. He had been fighting, as it seemed, a blind sky whence, at some Olympian order, terrible blows descended.

The bell tinkled and once again he went forward but this time slowly. He saw Staire clearly enough now, and, glory be, he was bleeding at the nose. But above that nose there was still the same supercilious disdainful face, now more confident and superior than ever it had been. He ran right in on him, saw the high white cheek quite close to him, swung a blow at it, missed it and in return received a crunching one on the jaw that sent all his teeth dashing together, seemed to sever his tongue in two and sent the crowd of eager faces, the wall of Runners, the grey menacing sky toppling on to his head.

He knew that he was down on his knees. He heard someone from an infinite distance saying "Three, Four, Five . . ."

Could he move? He could not. *Could* he move. Yes, he must. He commanded his body, which appeared now to have nothing at all to do with himself, to obey him. He rose, as he heard "Eight, Nine," cried above him. He swayed. Staire was coming for him again. He rolled rather than stepped aside and, as he did so, feebly aimed a blow. Of course he missed but this gave him an instant's respite. He stood simply, like a child having his first lesson, in an attitude of defence. His only desire, now, was to hold himself together. If he could only last until the bell went. . . . If he could only last. . . . But he moved like someone in a dream and strange wild thoughts were in his head, like "Two and two make five," and "Three Blind Mice."

But, had he only known it, Staire was himself somewhat exhausted. That earlier lucky blow of Jeremy's had shaken him badly and, like many another stylist, he hadn't the power to finish a thing well begun. Had he found Jeremy's face again, then the fight would have been over; but he waited just too long, feinted, danced on his toes a little, aimed at Jeremy's right eye and missed and—the bell went.

"Can you stick it?" Jumbo anxiously whispered.

"Course I can," Jeremy hoarsely muttered. And then, clear from the distance, came a small boy's voice: "Go it, Stocky! You've got him beat!"

Jeremy heard that, although he didn't hear the derisive laughter that followed it. He had sense enough left him to know that it was a lie, but it heartened him and seemed to call him together, as though someone had picked up his pieces from different parts of the field and presented them to him. (He didn't know that it was the Dormouse that had called out, nor did the Dormouse know that he had said "Stocky," a piece of cheek that the intense excitement of the moment excused.)

It was raining quite heavily now and the freshness of it in his face helped him; moreover it made the grass slippery and this hindered Staire's better and more practised foothold. They pulled forward his shorts and let the air blow through and they sponged his face. When the bell went yet once again he felt some fresh life pulsing through him. He must have been a fine sight then, one eye closed and one side of his face swelling to lop-sided size, his lip cut and bleeding badly.

Then a lucky thing occurred. Somebody in the crowd gave a derisive "Baa!" That tightened him. He would have the blood of the lot of them. They were laughing at him, were they? He forgot his pains and bruises. His body stiffened, his knees sagged no longer. With his remaining eye he saw quite clearly Staire standing there, his guard down, apparently waiting to be hit.

The fact was that Staire's backers had been telling him that the fight was practically over, that all that was needed to finish it was one good damaging blow, that Cole was completely finished and didn't know where he was, as tottering as an old woman. So

Staire stood choosing the place where young Cole should be hit.

And that was Jeremy's chance and he took it! He tumbled in, most unscientifically I fear, and caught Staire a Beautiful One between the eyes. Oh! what a Beautiful Blow that was! It does indeed deserve capital letters! It crashed into Staire's face with all the weight of Jeremy's strong young arm. He staggered back, surprise, horror and pain driving him to forget all thoughts of defence, and Jeremy, now in a berserk rage of strong revenge and lust, caught him another on the left eye, abruptly closing it, and then yet another beautifully on the chin.

At that instant the crowd forgot all authority and tradition and shouted again and again, the small boys' screams like the shrill cries of birds alarmed.

Staire's knees sagged. He raised one arm feebly. Jeremy tumbled right on him, pushed rather than struck him on the chest, and down he went.

He lay, half raised himself, lay once more, got on to his knees while Jeremy, panting, heaving, waited. Then once more he sank back covering his face with his hand and was counted out.

Less than a quarter of an hour had the fight lasted, but in that brief chronicle of time the War of the Sheep and the Goats was for ever ended.

CHAPTER XV

LIFE BEGINS TO-MORROW ?

I

THE fight was for some days the only top among the Lower School, at least in Leeson —and even the senior body of the House w stirred.

It had been a proper fight, no quarter given intended, and young Cole had shown amazi pluck. The public school world is even more fick than the great world beyond it, and nothing len authority there like the fist. Subtleties are at discount—there is no time for them and not muc brain for them, either—but anyone who can fig as Stocky Cole fought is somebody. Not th Staire was undervalued. It was considered th he was the more elegant fighter of the two a that the contest would certainly have been his, h he not been a little too sure of himself.

And the Feud was at an end. No more She and no more Goats. Stocky could have that pictu by his old Uncle on his table all day and no o would say a word.

"After all," said Gauntlet, making as usual t

best of two worlds, "sheep do sometimes look sort of purple in a certain light—when the sun's setting. And Stocky's uncle must know. He's been painting for years."

Jeremy himself had a harder problem to settle. He must speak to Staire. He hated to do it. He would just as soon never see Staire again. But they would be meeting every day, in class and out of it and there must be a reconciliation, outward if not inward. He had been the victor, so he must make the advance.

Moreover, he had to confess that he liked Staire better since the fight. He had himself recovered from some of the self-inferiority that he had felt so painfully before. Ever since that glorious blow, when his fist had so superbly crashed into Staire's face, he had thought that he rather liked the fellow. Never mind his superior ways. Now that he'd knocked him down he could disregard them. In addition to this Staire was an elegant fighter, very much better than himself, Jeremy. It was a piece of luck that he'd won and so—he must speak to Staire.

On the very morning after the fight he met him coming down the broad, stone steps out of Big School into Coulter's. He stopped, the bruise in the middle of his forehead blushing purple.

He held out his hand and Staire shook it—not very readily and a little in the grandee fashion—but still he shook it. Jeremy, gruff in the voice and self-conscious because several boys were passing, began:

"I'm sorry, Staire—all that rot . . . my fault."

Staire answered graciously :

" Yes, we were awfully idiotic. . . . I've just made an awful bloomer in the History paper—mixed up Anne of Cleves and Katherine Parr. How did you do ? "

Oh well, if he didn't want to talk about it !

" Not so bad. Only all that bit about the monasteries was stinking."

" Yes, wasn't it ? See you're playing for the First to-morrow against Odell's. Congrats."

" Thanks, most awfully."

And so the matter was, superficially at any rate, closed.

2

He did, on the next day, play against Odell's and he did nothing astonishing.

He was not in the most perfect trim, his head being yet very sore and his body tired. He and Steevens played behind completely victorious forwards and that should have been very nice for them, but the game was so desperately one-sided that it lost much of its interest.

Nevertheless, it was pleasant playing with Steevens.

After the game there was alarming news. It was just one of those afternoons when you expect bad tidings, when the sky is grey and grisly and a little wind, a little mean malicious mischievous wind, goes creeping from place to place, forebodings and forewarnings in every tone of its whiny and fraudulent whisper ; when buildings are dark and forbidding, when chimneys blow their smoke dis-

tressfully to heaven, when weather vanes moan, lights gutter and forsaken leaves whirl disconsolately at the feet of lamenting trees. Doors bang and windows rattle, hedges are dark and roads nakedly deserted. Jeremy had just changed when Jumbo came and said that he wanted to talk to him.

Now Jumbo was one of those friends of whom we all have a number, the best-hearted in the world and the most unselfish. But of their unselfishness they make a burden, spending their lives in doing for others things that others would much prefer not to have done for them; making martyrs of themselves in causes which are really not causes at all; being marvellously cheerful (and Oh! the effort it is!) when we would greatly prefer them to be naturally doleful; forcing their relations and neighbours into comforts that their relations and neighbours would prefer to do without; lamenting their physical weariness and exhaustion but maintaining with a brave smile that "they were managing to get along" in spite of their trials; and telling you pieces of gloomy news with an air of self-satisfied commiseration.

Of these are those orders of humans who come to you with those fateful words, "I think you ought to know what people are saying . . ." or "Do you think that you are altogether right in trusting . . . ?"

The world in general pays heavily for its noble and unselfish citizens—especially if they have but little sense of humour, as is almost always the case.

Jumbo was in the process of developing into just such an unselfish character—and this may be the

reason why Jeremy had been finding him a little difficult to deal with, of late. It may be also that Jumbo had that feeling—common to all of us, when our best friend has just scored a great success—that now is the time to see that he is not swollen-headed, that a little adverse treatment in the middle of all this glory will do him no kind of harm.

In any case Jumbo's face was a long one and his tone lugubrious.

"What's up?" said Jeremy suspiciously. He knew his Jumbo.

"I think you ought to know," began Jumbo, "what everyone is saying."

"What's everyone saying?" asked Jeremy.

"That there's going to be the most awful row about the fight; that the Camel's sent for Leeson and told him that he ought to be ashamed of himself for allowing it, and that you and Staire are going to be dropped on like anything."

"How do you mean," asked Jeremy, "dropped on?"

"Oh, I don't know. They say you won't be allowed to play footer any more this term."

"Not allowed to play?" Jeremy was horrified. Then, because he knew his Jumbo, he pulled himself together.

"Who says?" he asked scornfully.

"Oh, everybody," answered Jumbo, rather vaguely.

"Everybody! That isn't anybody," said Jeremy indignantly. "*Who* was it?"

"Oh, some of the chaps," answered Jumbo, who was beginning to think that perhaps he had gone

too far. "You know how they talk. I daresay there isn't anything in it."

"If there isn't anything in it what did you come and tell me about it for?"

"All right, you needn't get waxy."

"I'm not waxy!"

"Yes, you are. You're always waxy now."

"No, I'm not. But it's sickening to tell a man something and then not to have any reason for it."

"Well, they are saying it."

"Who are?"

"Oh, everybody."

This was hopeless and Jeremy went off, his head in the air. Nevertheless he was alarmed—and most seriously.

There had not for a long time been a real fight at Runners and it had been considerably discussed as to the views the authorities would have about it. After the last fight, between Morgan and Dance more than a year and a half ago, it had been said that another would never be allowed again, that the Camel held that these fights belonged to the age of barbarism and that he would put them down.

In the excitement before the battle and especially because he had been definitely encouraged by Llewellyn, who was a school prefect, Jeremy had lost sight of this aspect of the affair. Now it came before him with a dazzling suddenness.

In ordinary circumstances the danger would not have been very great. The end of the term was now only a fortnight distant and a licking or "confinement to barracks" would not be a serious penalty—but, as things actually were, it was a matter

to him of life and death. It seemed to him, as he looked at it with a schoolboy's exaggeration of immediate circumstances, as though the whole future of his life was at stake.

Because, as the end of the term was only a fortnight away, so also was the match against Callendar.

Now the two matches against Callendar, in the summer cricket and in the winter football, were the two great sporting events of the Crale year. Callendar was the only great public school within any reasonable distance, geographically, of Crale. Its records were as fine as Crale's and for over sixty years these two schools had fought out annually these two great struggles.

To play in the Callendar Match was the final ambition of every Crale boy. It meant not only your First Colours but a glorious memory that would last your lifetime. Certain of these games were historic and to have played in them made yourself a historic figure.

All Jeremy's attempted self-disciplines and anxieties this term had hung round the Callendar game. He had not, at the beginning of the term, dared to admit to himself that he had any real chance of playing, but as term had advanced it became clear that the competition for scrum-halves was this term of a low average, that his two rivals were neither of them very satisfactory. Above all Steevens, who was certain of his place as stand-off half, preferred to play with him. His luck had been in and out, but during the last fortnight in the House Matches he had played well.

Until this new danger arose he had not realized how frantic his ambition had become. It was true that he had in all probability four more football seasons at Crale, but it seemed to him, in the immediate press of the conditions, that there would be no glory at all in playing *next* year or the year after. Did he gain his cap this season he would be one of the youngest boys ever capped at Crale and he would, with all those other seasons before him, be almost assured of his captaincy before he left the school.

Moreover, because of the happenings of this term, his temporary disgrace, the behaviour of both Leeson and Parlow, it was urgently necessary for him to re-establish himself.

Finally, Crale had been beaten by Callendar for the last two years. Without undue conceit he was sure that himself and Steevens, as a pair, could help Crale to victory as no other halves in the school could.

Steevens did play better with himself as partner than with anyone else, and Steevens, with his strange unorthodox brilliance, might easily turn the scale in the school's favour.

And now, just as the football gods were beginning to realize this, this other thing might slip in and prevent it.

Oh, if they were determined to punish him, let them choose any other penalties than this! He would suffer a hundred lickings, confine himself to his own Study for ever, write out five thousand lines rather than be deprived of the great chance of his life!

The awful thing was the uncertainty. You coul not tell what people were thinking. He watche the Camel anxiously in Chapel, to see whether h were in disgrace, but the Camel never apparentl looked at him. He invented a need for notebook that he might go to Leeson's study and mark hi behaviour to him, but Leeson was busy and had n time for more than a curt permission.

Every instant he expected some heavy hand to fa upon him and that he would be led off to hear h sentence.

This began to dig into his nerves as nothing ha since, as a tiny kid, he had waited trembling for th visits of the Sea Captain. His sleep deserted him a thing unknown to him in all his life before.

He woke at strange hours to lie there, seeing th others stretched like corpses around him, to hear th sea restlessly warning him of the worst, to thin as one does at those accursed hours, of all his sin and misfortunes, of all the people who hated him of all the silly things he had done and the sillie things he was yet likely to do. At such a time i seemed to him that his doom was certain, that h had no chance at all and that he would be for eve marked out in a jeering world as the boy wh missed his chance because of a stupid fight.

But why did they not pronounce their horribl sentence? Why did they leave it hanging abov his head in this cruel fashion? They were wors than the Inquisition torturers of whom he ha read in "Westward Ho!" and other gloriou works.

At last he could endure his suspense no longe

and resolved to go and ask Llewellyn for the fatal truth.

He was shy about this. Llewellyn might fancy that he was taking advantage of the invitation to tea—but he must go.

So he went. And, poking his head inside the door, discovered Corner in there alone.

"Oh . . . " he said foolishly.

Corner, who was leaning up against the bookcase staring into vacancy, said, without moving his head.

"Well?"

This was not very encouraging.

"Oh," said Jeremy again. "I say, is Llewellyn here?"—a foolish remark because Llewellyn most obviously wasn't.

"No," said Corner. "Do you want him?"

"Silly ass," thought Jeremy. "Of course I do or I wouldn't have asked for him."

"Yes," he said.

"He'll be back in a minute," Corner said, without moving. Then slowly he turned his head and staring at Jeremy as though he were beholding him for the first time in his life, said:

"I say—have you ever read any Keats?"

"Any what?" asked Jeremy, bewildered. He was now well within the room.

"Any Keats. Poetry."

"Oh, no," said Jeremy relieved.

"I thought you might have." Corner looked sourly disappointed. "You're the fellow who's got an uncle who paints, aren't you?"

"Yes."

"So I thought you might have read Keats too."

Jeremy said nothing and an awkward silence crept about the room. Into this most happily the stout Llewellyn plunged. "Hullo!" he cried, seeing Jeremy.

He was surprised and that made it no easier. Nevertheless Jeremy went forward. He wished terribly that Corner was not there.

"Look here. I didn't want to disturb you. It's only a minute."

"No, that's all right," Llewellyn said standing, his legs well spread, looking at Jeremy and smiling. When he smiled he was charming; all his natural good heart, his clumsy amiability, the real, true sweetness of his very simple character, came out in that smile. And he liked young Cole, he liked him better every time he saw him.

"What's the row?" he asked.

"It's like this," Jeremy said, in his urgency forgetting Corner and all his surroundings. "I've got a chance of playing in the Callendar game, haven't I? Everyone knows I have and Steevens is certain to play and he'd rather play with me as scrum-half than with anyone else, and they've tried all the other combinations and neither Burnett nor Robson are right, are they? Well then," he paused to draw breath, "I'm frightfully keen on playing of course—anyone is. I don't want you to tell me whether I'm playing, but chaps have been saying that someone's going to kick up a row because of the fight I had with Staire the other day, and that they're going to drop on me and perhaps stop my playing."

He paused. He looked at Llewellyn, and when their eyes met it seemed that they had gone a step further in their friendship.

"Oh, Lord," said Llewellyn. "I hadn't heard anything about it. I hope they won't." This was in a way reassuring, but in a way it was not. Llewellyn hadn't heard anything—*that* was good—on the other hand he was obviously alarmed.

"Do you think there can be anything in it?" he asked.

"I don't know," Llewellyn answered slowly. "Leeson's a rum bird. You never know what he's thinking."

"He hasn't said anything to you?"

"Not a word. And I went and told him there was going to be a fight, and he said all right, go ahead."

"Oh, did you? That was awfully decent of you."

"Not a bit. I told you I would. But the Camel may have made a row since."

"Oh, may he?"

"They say he meant to stamp on the Runners scraps altogether. I don't know. On the other hand I bet Leeson told him before it came off and he could have stopped it then."

"Yes, he could, couldn't he?" said Jeremy relieved. "Thanks most awfully."

He turned to go. It seemed that Llewellyn wanted to say something more to him. But he didn't. So Jeremy went. Only oddly out in the passage Jeremy thought to himself, "I don't believe Corner likes me."

Very soon the topic with everyone began to be the Callendar match. In Leeson's it was a topic of fiery interest and for this reason—it was discovered that if young Cole was chosen Leeson's would have more boys in the team than any other House. They were certain of four—three forwards, Llewellyn, Monteith and Wakefield, one three-quarter, Barry. Bunt's might have four, if Burnett played instead of Cole. If Cole played Leeson's would have five, a larger number in this particular match than there had been within anyone's memory.

As soon as, therefore, it was discovered that there was this House rivalry in the matter the excitement was terrific. Stocky Cole *must* play. Of *course* he was better than Burnett—everyone knew that. It was only dirty favouritism on Bunt's part that gave Burnett a chance. There were darkly whispered plots in the Lower School as to the private poisoning of Burnett by putting glass into his drink—or why not break his leg by tying a string across his House-door at night? The Dormouse, now a very active member of society, was one of the most fertile in these plans. There followed, then, a House Game between Bunt's and Haggard's, in which Burnett played extremely well and one between Leeson's and Bunt's in which Jeremy, hopelessly nervous for the first time in his life, did less than nothing at all.

Jeremy was watched and cared for as a prize animal might be, advised as to his food, begged not to go out after dark, pestered with advice as to his play, urged to practise secretly with Steevens.

As the days advanced he was himself in a panic. He had never known anything like this. He felt, at length, that it would be a relief to find the names up and his own not among them. Anything to escape from this hateful uncertainty. . . .

3

To-day, at last, the uncertainty would be over. Between five and six in the afternoon the team would be up on the Games Board.

As he dressed and ran down to Call-Over he wondered how he would last through the hours. He held himself in, speaking to no one lest he should show his anxiety.

He had a difficult time with Parlow that morning. Parlow had been strange during the last fortnight, uneasy, ironical, making as it were approaches back to the old relationship again.

But Jeremy gave him no help. He was not going to forget in a hurry. And he was uneasy with Parlow now. He didn't trust him any longer. And when he didn't trust anybody he was at a loss. He didn't know how to behave.

Oddly enough they were this morning in the English lesson again, back at the "Tintern Abbey" that had originally caused the trouble. Many weeks of deep thinking and serious attention had brought the class through a bewildering underbrush of thirty lines or so. (A sure method this of successfully slaughtering any boy's natural love of good poetry.)

Jeremy remembered his bit well enough this morning:

> If this
> Be but a vain belief, yet oh! how oft
> In darkness, and amid the many shapes
> Of joyless daylight: when the fretful stir
> Unprofitable, and the fever of the world
> Have hung upon the beatings of my heart
> How oft, in spirit, have I turned to thee
> O sylvan Wye!

He said his lines admirably, quite correctly, and with exactly no meaning in them at all.

Parlow looked at him with cold irony, but behind the irony he seemed to say:

"Look here, let's be friends again! Forgive what I did. Let's be as we were!"

Jeremy regarded him stonily, as though he were the image of Daddy Wordsworth himself, and, while he was monotonously reciting, his brain was arguing: "But if they play Burnett they've simply lost the match. Anyone could tell them at . . ."

"And what, my dear young friend," asked Parlow, "do you consider is meant exactly by 'the many shapes of joyless daylight'?"

Jeremy considered. "Well, sir, I should think he sometimes got sick of everything, didn't find anything amusing." (And he was thinking: "Anyway if they do put Burnett in Steevens will make a nice row. . . .")

"Oh, that's your opinion is it?" Parlow continued. "Rather badly put, but one can scarcely perhaps expect good style from a famous footballer. . . ."

(And *he* was saying: "Come along now! We used to have such a good time. If I did lose my temper you're very irritating at times you know.")

"'The fretful stir,'" Parlow went on. "Why fretful, do you think?"

"Taken from children, sir," said Jeremy promptly. "Children are fretful and—and—make a stir."

(He was thinking: "Perhaps the Camel will tell them that he thinks I oughtn't to play. Rotten trick if he does. If he wanted to punish me he could give me a licking. . . .")

"Very ingenious, friend Cole," Parlow was saying. "Mr. Wordsworth would undoubtedly be grateful if he heard you. But why limit fretfulness to children? You would scarcely call yourself a child, I gather, and even schoolmasters at times have been known to——"

This roused of course a hearty laugh throughout the form but Jeremy did not even hear it. He was thinking, "And Burnett never goes down to the scrums properly. He funks them every time. Everyone says so. . . ."

4

He could eat no dinner. The hot slabs of mutton, the monotonous cabbage, how repulsive they were! No one mentioned the game to him but it was in everybody's thoughts.

There was a House Practice and he waited wearily under a biting cold wind while scrums

were formed again and again, and shouted at by Wakefield, one of the certainties for the Callendar match. Llewellyn was in all probability at that very moment with the other selectors choosing the team, and at that thought he warmed a little because Llewellyn undoubtedly liked him and wanted him to play. He liked Llewellyn; yes, he thought about it, standing shivering on the field, while the incoherent scrimmages flopped and fell and rose again. The three boys in the school he liked best—Jumbo, Llewellyn and Ridley—how different they were! He was afraid, he realized, of something in Llewellyn's liking for him. While he was only too safe in his friendship for Jumbo, so that it was in danger of tedium, and while his feeling about Ridley called out of him nothing but hero-worship and a determination to do the very best at everything, with Llewellyn there was something "queer" . . . he wasn't comfortable. . . . Oh, here was practice over! He could go. He ran up to the changing room, and with a shock so savage that it was like a blow in the face from an enemy, he understood that in a moment or two now the list would be up. By the time he had changed it would be on the wall and his fate decided.

He stood for a moment, sick in the stomach, and his legs refused to take him on to the changing room. He drove himself forward. He didn't want to speak to a soul. He took his shower, noticed that his body was trembling, rubbed himself violently, huddled on his clothes.

His body now was icy cold but his head hot. He

felt that he must give himself away completely to anyone who saw him. He walked out into the air and stood there in the cold wind, pushing his hands through his hair.

The list was in all probability up there now and he hadn't the courage to go and see. No, he hadn't the courage. Someone must come and tell him. But—if they were playing Burnett. . . . Well, anyone could see. . . . Oh, he didn't care. It was only this waiting. Well, why wait any longer? The list was there. He turned slowly towards the Big School corridor where the sporting notices were always posted and as he went he observed ridiculous things, a piece of dirty newspaper whirling by itself, as though it were taking exercise for warmth; some boys kicking a football on the field, and how long the ball seemed to linger in the air against the grey and crumpled sea; a boy hurrying past him, a pile of books under his arm. . . . Oh, the idiot that he was! Let him get it over and have done with it. He moved through the big doors and saw the long stone corridor stretching apparently for miles in front of him and on the far end at the right against the bright yellow board what was, from where he stood, a tiny square of white.

Slowly he went down the corridor. At the moment there was no one there. He was alone in the whole school, save for someone who, in the distance, was tinkling a piano.

He choked in the throat. Unknowingly he clenched his hot damp hands behind his back. He looked up.

There it was:

CRALE *v.* CALLENDAR

A list of names. Nowhere his own. Hoskyns. . . . Bender. . . . Forsyte. . . . Marsh. Richards Mi. Wakefield. . . .

He could have sobbed with disappointment and then—as though it had suddenly leaped upon the page:

Half-Backs Cole
Steevens

Cole, Steevens—COLE, STEEVENS. COLE. . . . COLE. . . . COLE. . . .

He turned away, smiling at nothing in an idiotic manner.

A group of boys, chattering eagerly, were hastening to the board.

He fled as though he had committed a crime.

CHAPTER XVI

THE MATCH AGAINST CALLENDAR

I

THE great day broke in fog, sea fog, dank, spidery, chilly and blinding. The only thing beside a bed-rock frost to fear. And here it was. What was God about ?

At eight o'clock the fog was blinding and you could hear the signals of the ships at sea. At nine o'clock it had cleared a little and you could see men as trees walking. At ten it had come on again and it crept into the class room writhing its horrid way about forms and boys and masters.

"No match to-day," Parlow said grimly, and everyone hated Parlow. At eleven it was thin again and at twelve a miserable sun like a shabby soup plate made a ring.

At one o'clock there was no fog, the Callendar team had arrived and everyone was singing.

The tortures suffered by Jeremy during the morning could not be described by the author of "A Rebours" at his most grimy. Until one o'clock, when it was certain that the match would be played, he thought that he would make a hole

in the sea if it was " off " ; after one o'clock, suicide seemed the only alternative to eternal disgrace. He wouldn't be able to play. He had better go and tell them so. His legs didn't belong to him, he couldn't see, he was sick in the stomach.

At two o'clock they were gathered together for a few words from Beltane, their gallant captain. He was red-headed and some seven feet odd in height. To Jeremy he was a full grown man, as old as Uncle Samuel. He had a moustache. His wrath when things went wrong was something terrible.

" Look here, you chaps," he said. " We've got to win to-day. Partly because we haven't been beaten this term yet and partly because Callendar's won three years running. We're up against a stiff lot to-day and Mellon's probably the best three-quarter playing on any school side this season. But that needn't worry us. We've got a better pack than theirs or I'll go and bury myself. I'm not saying anything against the three-quarters, who are fine, but I expect we'd better make it a forward game. And quick, their three-quarters. Mellon's the devil. And remember, whatever happens in the first half you can always win any game in the second half, so don't get down-hearted. On the other hand, if we have some luck in the first half don't get over confident. The game isn't won until the last whistle goes."

Jeremy, listening, felt that he would willingly die for him. Then, of course, Bunt had to say a few foolish words, and everyone hated him and wished him buried. The Callendar men came on to the

field first and there was the polite cheering of hosts who want their guests to be comfortable, but when the Crale team ran out you could surely have heard the shout at Land's End, had you been there listening.

But Jeremy, as he ran on, was conscious of nothing but the state of the ground. It was hard, damned hard. There was a thin silver rime of frost, and frosted ridges where the soil had been kicked up in the mud. It would *hurt* when you fell. But that was a thought to keep away from you. Nevertheless, he wished his throat was not so dry and he was sure that everyone must see how his knees were trembling.

And then the Callendar people looked *enormous*. Giants ! The Crale forwards would never be able to hold them.

He was aware of the crowd as a kind of black wall penning him in. He dared not look at it, nor think of it, nor consider the way that it would feel did he miss something or funk going down to the scrum. *That* scrum ! How would he ever be able to stop them ?

The whistle blew.

Yes, the whistle blew and exactly one second later the most awful thing in all the recorded history of Crale School occurred.

Mellon, the Callendar star, scored a try.

How it happened Jeremy never exactly knew. Crale had kicked off, the Callendar back had gathered the ball and punted back, somebody picked it up, passed forward, there was a scrimmage, and a moment later the Callendar half had it, had

passed to Mellon and Mellon was off. He eluded Bender, the Crale three-quarter, side-stepped Hoskyns, the back, and had touched the ball down.

To say that this was tragedy was to say nothing. You could feel the horror of it strike the crowd like a blinding lightning flash. No sound came. No movement, only a dreadful heart-stopped hush, as the world waited to see whether Callendar would kick a goal or no. Callendar did kick a goal. Callendar had a lead of five points in the first minute.

2

Upon Jeremy this devastating catastrophe produced one of his cold remorseless rages. Upon the rest of the Crale team also, perhaps. Certainly upon Jeremy. As always when something terrible happened to him, he saw all the Cole family gathered together, insulted and injured. It was as though someone had just stepped up and told him that his father was a rotten preacher, that his sister Mary was plain beyond bearing, that his sister Helen was a conceited prig. Also, as though his family were stationed just in front of the crowd, remarks were passing on every side of them: "Of course Crale hasn't a chance against Callendar." "That boy Mellon will run through again and again." "He'll do just what he likes with them all."

Moreover, he could tell from the way that the Callendar men carried themselves, as they triumphantly strutted back to the middle of the field again that they were thinking the same as the crowd: "Well, this is going to be an easy thing. All

we've got to do is to see that Mellon has the ball. That oughtn't to be difficult. We'll knock up a record score."

Now, as every boy in the Crale team was feeling just as Jeremy, it was not unnatural that when the whistle sounded and one of the Callendar three-quarters, gathering the ball, failed to hold it, the Crale forwards were upon the Callendarians like lions let loose on an Indian village.

Now Beltane had been right when he said that the Crale pack this season was an unusually good one. It was in physical size, with the exception of Beltane himself and Llewellyn, smaller than the Callendar pack, but Beltane had a genius for forward play (as, if India hadn't claimed him, England would afterwards most certainly have discovered) and throughout that term he had been educating and chiding and drilling those forwards as though they had been his own children. The result of this was that they worked as one brain. They knew what they could do and what each one of them could do. Those were the days before "Wingers" and before the time when a forward had to be almost as fast as a three-quarter, if he was worth his place; but Beltane had some ideas before his time and if little Ronny Marsh wasn't exactly a "winger" he was as near to it as no matter.

The Callendar forwards, thick and heavy to a man, had learnt to pack and to shove and that was about all that they could do.

It was soon discovered that the Crale forwards were getting the ball nine times out of ten, and as

soon as the school crowd behind the ropes discovered this the cheering became frantic. The Callendar backs were forced to kick again and again into touch to save their position.

And now Jeremy came into his game. If there is anything in this world that a scrum-half loves it is to have his forwards heeling out the ball well and cleanly and then to have a wise and astute stand-off-half to pass to. All these conditions were now Jeremy's, and for ten minutes he knew perfect happiness.

The artist in him could feel the symmetry and rhythm that informed those eight bending and straining bodies in front of him, and there spread to his own heart that sacred fire that was burning in theirs.

"Coming right, Crale," and then the swing, the urge, the quick clean flick of the back row of heels and out the ball came and away, a second later, to Steevens.

How often, during those ten minutes, should Crale have scored, and how often, alas, did the Crale three-quarters bungle their passes, send them forward, misfield them, bunch too closely together, run straight when they should have feinted, kick into touch when the field was clear in front of them!

As magnificent as were the Crale forwards during that time, so disappointing and wrong-headed were the Crale three-quarters.

And yet, as school three-quarters go, they were not a bad line. On an ordinary day against an ordinary team they would have won fine, green laurels. Or it may have been that they were as good as the Callendar men allowed them to be.

Certainly the Callendar marking and collaring was of the very finest order. They had that stamp of the first-class footballer—they had prevision. Mellon, above all, seemed to rule the game as a great player of chess might do, dictating the moves to the other side and then spoiling them.

But if Mellon was the genius of the Callendar team it was clear enough by now that Steevens was the genius of Crale. No move, now, that he did not attempt. Testing one three-quarter after another, he showed no disappointment when they failed him. It was as though he were always behind them, suggesting the right thing for them to do.

Jeremy himself had the strangest sense that he and Steevens were the same man in the same body. The Callendar scrum-half was a little, thin, wiry creature with a long nose; he was everywhere at once and was, Jeremy was certain, more generally off-side than not, but Jeremy and Steevens were too much for him. He was losing his temper, Jeremy perceived with pleasure, and muttering wild and savage words. All the better. Lose your temper and your game was spoilt.

Nevertheless, it was at last evident that for the moment at least the Crale three-quarters were of no use, so that a forward game it must be and a forward game it became.

Now, shrilly from behind the ropes, came the scream from a hundred throats: "Feet! Feet! Feet! . . . FEET, SCHOOL" . . . and "Feet" it was. It was worth going a hundred miles by sea or land to watch how the Crale forwards kept the

ball, how they broke, dribbled, formed; how, when the Callendar forwards fell on the ball, they massed and shoved and shoved again; and then, when the whistle sounded, how swiftly and neatly they packed; and then, instead of heeling, rushed the big Callendar men off their ground, broke and dribbled and swerved and feinted. Now at last the ball was in the enemy Twenty Five, nearer and ever nearer, and the crowd behind the ropes became hysterical with joy and rapture.

Then came a moment when Crale was almost over. Nothing could be seen but the heaving bodies confused and commingled on the goal line itself. Jeremy was aware of nothing, crouching beside the turmoil waiting for that miraculous moment when the ball would appear, touch his hands and be off to the three-quarters, who could surely not, at that distance, fail to score.

But the ball did not appear. Someone fell someone fell on top of him, then someone else, and beyond the tangled heap came the clear call of the whistle: "Five yards back!"

Back they went, down again, the ball flung in. The Callendar forwards had it and manœuvred the finest wheel of the match, swinging round against all opposition, keeping the ball between their feet and dribbling it in one gigantic rush back to the middle of the field.

A great sigh went up from behind the ropes. The chance was lost. When, oh when, would it occur again?

It was then that Jeremy was aware of Bender, the Crale three-quarter, facing the great Mellon.

He knew (but he could not tell you how he knew) that Bender was terrified. His spirit seemed to enter into Bender's spirit. There was no moment in the whole game when he was more intent on his own business, but behind that intentness seemed to be this other knowledge—Bender was terrified and was going to let them down.

Bender was recognized as nervous and sometimes undependable but he was chosen for his speed. He stood there now, waiting on his wing, apparently calm and prepared; but Jeremy *knew*. Did Callendar score another goal before half-time and the game was as good as lost. How *could* they make more than ten points in the second half against such an opposition? It must be almost half-time now.

Mellon, who had a strange face, with a large nose and heavy, beetling black eyebrows, assumed for Jeremy then the figure of some avenging fate. He seemed to grow in size, and when Jeremy, slinging the ball into the scrum, could not see him he yet felt him there, standing over the wretched Bender, waiting to pounce.

In an agony of terror Jeremy saw that the Callendar forwards had the ball, that it was out and away. It passed with a beautiful, clean, swinging movement along the three-quarter line, and Mellon had it. He swerved past Bender who missed him altogether. Had he run then straight down the touch line he must have scored; but for once, making a wrong decision, he swerved inward, passed Llewellyn and some forwards and then came tearing in Jeremy's direction.

If Jeremy ever felt small in his life he felt small

then. He had always known, ever since he had first started to play football, that if there was one thing in life of which, in his secret heart, he was desperately afraid, it was of tackling a big and fast three-quarter. He did not care (or at least in his normal healthy days he did not care) to how many forward rushes he went down. That seemed to be his natural job. But this other, its isolation, the danger of a swerve that left you gaping foolishly in mid-air, or the risk of tackling too high, so that you were shaken off and flung for nothing, or the other peril of meeting him full shock and getting a concussion that made you useless for the remainder of the game, all these things he knew only too terribly well.

Now the worst was upon him. He felt that the field behind him was clear and that Hoskyns, the back, rushing across, would never be in time. If he missed this, Mellon could take his pleasure, plant the ball where he fancied and a goal would be the certain result.

A bridge in an endless space ! His heart guttered, his eyes darkened, he saw an enormous tree detach itself from the far end of the field, and, black as ebony, wave its branches derisively against a silver sky. He heard some voice call. He flung himself forward and for an instant Mellon's face with its thick, bushy eyebrows rushed at him like a flying moon. He fell forward straight against Mellon's bony knees and round those his arms tightened like a vice.

He knew that Mellon was falling and a triumphant crow echoed somewhere in his throat. Mellon

crashed to the ground, Jeremy slipping away from him as he fell.

When he picked himself up he could hear them shouting. Steevens running past him cried, " Well tackled, Stocky ! " and a moment later he was bending beside the scrum again shouting : " Coming left, school. . . . Coming left ! "

He had saved the situation for the moment, but only for the moment. Once more the Callendar forwards had the ball, once more it was out and swinging down the Callendar line.

Mellon had it and this time made no mistake but ran straight up the touch line. Bender was opposite to him. It was not a difficult tackle but Jeremy with agony knew that Bender would miss it.

He hesitated, put out his hands feebly, caught the slack of Mellon's bags and Mellon was past him. Hoskyns went for him but Mellon swerved and the ball was touched down behind the goal posts.

The kick for goal missed, the ball just slanting on the outside of the posts.

The whistle went for half-time. Callendar led by eight points to none.

3

The sudden cessation of that desperate preoccupation has something startlingly precipitate about it. The whistle blows and the outside world swings back.

The field that had seemed immense narrowed itself. The group of trees at the sea end of it came forward with an intimate and friendly air. The

dark crowd behind the ropes drew near and Jeremy fancied that he could distinguish figures known to him, Mrs. Bunt and Mrs. Leeson and Parlow. . . .

He was aware sharply of his own body. A cold wind was blowing across the ground and getting into his skin. He was sore in various places. On the inside of one groin, the left knee, the back of his head somewhere.

He knew that he was not as badly depressed as he ought to be. A lead of eight points to none! . . . Whew! That was terrible. Small chance of a victory now, perhaps. But it had been a splendid forty minutes. The grandest of his life. And as long as he lived he would remember his tackle of Mellon, the thrill of that clutch round the bare knees—yes, whatever happened in the game there would always be that to remember!

The light was going to be bad before the end of the game. The sky was clear, a pale crystal white touched faintly with a shadow of apricot. A sharp frost was in the air, and he could feel the ground hardening under his feet. Behind him, the hill was darkening and the great pile of school buildings were dimly purple against the pure, white sky. Frost, silver biting stars, chrysanthemums, promise of Christmas, the dark, black line of the watching spectators, all these things hung together, like clothes in a cupboard, in his mind. He sucked his lemon, then saw that Beltane wanted them. They gathered in a bunch around him.

"Don't think we're going to be beaten," he was saying, "because we're not. What's eight points? They won't last. They're fat. We've only got

to push them hard." He had a lot of other things to say but Jeremy couldn't listen. He wanted to speak to Steevens, and was aware, through that odd subconscious connection that he had with him, that Steevens wanted to speak to him. As soon as Beltane had finished he slipped across and Steevens turned to him as though he knew he'd been coming.

"Look here, Stocky," he said. "We've got to attack more. They're not nearly as sound in defence. Not even Mellon. I'm going out on my own a bit. Never mind if we make mistakes. It's better to risk it." Then he added, "It's a fine game! I don't care whether we win or lose. It's a ripping game!"

Jeremy felt that, too. As he went back to his place he knew that he was extraordinarily happy. He would like life to go on like this, just like this, for ever. At the same time he wanted to win. He wanted it terribly. Two goals would do it if Callendar failed to score again. There was a monstrous "*if*" there, as he felt, with some sinking of the heart when he saw them all lined out there, waiting for the whistle.

But Crale could do better than it had done in the first half. The three-quarters could do better. Barry for instance—the best three-quarter Crale had had for years and as yet he had done nothing at all. . . .

The whistle went, a great roar came up from the crowd, "School! School! SCHOOL!" and at once again the Crale forwards pressed and at once again the ball was heeled out cleanly, found Jeremy, and then was out and away. It was clear, too, that a

new figure had come on to the scene, a new revived and urgent Barry.

Barry, who was rather of Jeremy's build, did not look a three-quarter, and certainly he had not the speed of Bender. He was, with Beltane, the oldest member of the Crale team, but he was considered principally as a defensive player because he was strong, fearless and an admirable tackler.

But now he seemed to be fired with a divine impetus. A dozen times in the first five minutes he was away, and on each occasion he was brought down by the Callendar defence. A new, triangular understanding seemed to be developed between himself, Jeremy and Steevens; it was almost as though they were the only active players on the Crale side.

There seemed to be some truth in the prophecy that the Callendar forwards would tire. They were heavy men and their bulk was beginning to tell on them. The little Callendar half was raging and foaming at the way in which the Crale forwards were heeling the ball. "Get it and—Heel, Callendar!" he screamed, in a funny, frenzied screech, and he was for ever rushing round to Jeremy's side, always to find that he was too late and that the ball was away.

He used the most shocking words and cursed everything and everybody. All to no purpose. The forwards would not do as he implored them.

Then came a line out, Llewellyn jumped for the ball, caught it and tossed it back to Barry, who was off with a speed that his build denied.

Here his strength helped him. He brushed past

three or four forwards and had some open ground in front of him, but alas, he tripped in a rut and fell. The Crale forwards carried the ball on, it rolled back, Jeremy picked it up and flung it to Barry. Once more he was off, and now, instead of running straight, he turned inwards, slipped Mellon, and, with a speed that no one had ever seen him use before, outpaced the Callendar back and touched the ball down on the far right-hand corner.

Then there was a roar such as those old trees had seldom heard. It was triumphant and magnificent, and the old buildings behind it seemed to echo it and carry it up to the rosy, pillow-shaped clouds hovering over the crooked chimneys.

Suddenly as it rose, so suddenly it fell. There was a dead and flattened stillness. Williams was lying on his belly, placing the ball for Forsyte to kick. It was at a desperately difficult angle, the light was not good, a little wind played sportively about the ground, as though set free by some Callendar demon.

So still was the world that the rattle of a cart came clearly from the neighbouring road. Breathless, everyone watched and waited. Then the Callendar men ran forward, the ball soared into the air magnificently as though pulled by some friendly string, swerved towards the post. From where Jeremy was standing it was impossible to see whether it had achieved the miraculously incredible or no; then the two touch judges raised their arms and another shout lifted to heaven greater and more triumphant than the last.

Five points to eight and fifteen minutes to go!

4

It was then that the Callendar team showed of what truly fine metal it was made. Jeremy will never, so long as he lives, forget the next ten minutes. In fierce moments afterwards, when in France the last inch of endurance was demanded from him; in light, silly times at a theatre, in some foreign road, lying lazily in bed just before dropping off to sleep, swimming idly in some sunny sea, the echo of a memory would come to him—"*That* was a day—that time when the Callendar men pushed us off the ball in the second half, when there was fifteen minutes to go!" And an odd, confused medley of the frosty field, the white cold sky, the bunched, rosy clouds, the dry, rich smell of chrysanthemums, the thick, black line of onlookers, Beltane's tumbled hair, the black smudge on Barry's cheek, Mellon's bushy eyebrows, Steevens' strange, cold, imperturbable glance, these all came back to him as came no picture of any other game in which he ever played.

After that goal Callendar was inspired. They had been, perhaps, too confident, although long ere this they had known that they were up against no ordinary team. But now they were not going to have victory snatched from them as one goal would snatch it. What! After leading by five points in the first minute! Not if they knew it!

So they played like demons, every one of them. They seemed themselves now to make the choice that it should be forward play. They packed and shoved, broke and dribbled like giants working under

one master mind. In vain Beltane, realizing that as the moments passed the chances of that winning goal were shredding away to the wind, urged and cajoled and threatened and swore. No one could have done more than he, no body of men worked more desperately, with more sweating purpose, more determined courage than the men who were with him. Relentlessly the Callendar pack had its way, first a scrum shoving the Crale men off the ball, then a dribble, then a pick up, a fling to the three-quarter, a tackle, the ball on the ground again, a desperate pick up and run from some clumsy lumbering forward, a roll out to touch, a line-out, a Callendar forward with the ball again, another dribble—and at last a terrible struggle on the Crale goal-line itself.

Jeremy seemed to have flung all soul and body into that frantic opposition. He was eight men, fifteen, twenty, hoarsely crying the ball, then flinging himself at the thing, as it moved among the knees and feet and scrambling bodies, then, when the struggle was almost on the goal-line itself, realizing that there could be but five minutes to go, knowing that one struggle, wriggle forward over an inch of ground on the part of a Callendar man meant final failure, feeling nothing but that now, when it had come to this, death would be preferable to defeat—so he fought for the life of himself, the school, very eternity.

Behind the ropes now there were only maniacs. Men, women, children shouting, imploring, cursing, bellowing, whispering . . . and down on Farloes Road an old man driving two pigs to their sty

stopped and scratched his head and sniffed the air. He knew that a great battle was toward.

The very rosy clouds themselves stayed suspended, hanging to Crale chimneys to steady their wandering attention.

Four minutes to go!

It seemed that Callendar was over. A great heap fell, pell-mell, over the line, the ball beneath them. The Callendar men rose shouting. A ghastly agonizing doubt rose in the hearts behind the ropes. But the referee gave it a five yards scrum. Three minutes to go.

For once the Crale men had the ball, for once it was heeled out sharply into Jeremy's very hands. A second later Steevens had it.

He turned, swerved, raised his arms and then flung, far and out, above the heads of the intervening three-quarters, to Barry on the wing.

It was a risk of the most perilous. Had Barry missed it there, in the very Crale Twenty Five and in front of goal (the forwards, indeed, had broken all sound rules by heeling), Mellon must have scored.

But Barry didn't miss it, and even as he caught it, with the same impulse he was off straight down the touch line with three-quarters of the field to go, with a half-back and Mellon flying for him, no one to pass to were he tackled.

Mellon missed him (and would not forget that miss even in his grey-bearded evenings), the half-back caught his jersey, it ripped, streamed in mid air, but Barry was not stayed. There remained the back. He sped for him, Barry swerved, the back had him by the leg, Barry kicked, almost fell,

stumbled, half tumbling erected himself, tumbled again, fell headlong over the Callendar line planting his ball as he fell.

The roar rose and died. Would Forsyte kick another goal ? This time the angle was not difficult. The little wind had died. The ball sailed like a darling, clear, free, straight between the posts.

Crale had won their game by ten points to eight.

CHAPTER XVII

NIGHT-PIECE : HOUSE-SUPPER

I

JEREMY watched the evening creep up from the sea. Creep was not the word, though. Now that they were in December night came with a rush, and before you could realize it there was one faint bar of gold over the sea, and for the rest only the shiver of the hedges, the cry of the sheep, the pat-pat of the rhythmic waves. He loved that sensation of being caught by the dark. There was a deep sense of adventure in it.

It had happened to him now. He had gone down to the tuck-shop to buy a ball of string to tie things up with. To-day was the last day of term. This morning marks had been read out and Jeremy was half way up his new form. Not bad at all and as six boys, at least, would win their " moves," next term would see Jeremy sitting about sixth in the form. Not bad that. He was moving on.

Down there at the tuck-shop had been little Ronny Marsh, one of the school forwards who had played in the great Callendar Match, and Jeremy had been talking to him on quite equal terms—a surprising thing, if you stopped to consider it.

They had been talking, of course, of the great game and had been chuckling—as all the school had chuckled—over the undoubted fact that the game had been won by an impertinent piece of absolutely forbidden play. To pass in front of your own goal as Steevens had done (and such a risky pass in itself, too), well, such a thing would make a man like Bunt turn in his stomach. But that was just like Steevens. He could do things that other fellows couldn't. He would try something that seemed hopelessly mad, but for him it wouldn't be.

And then Marsh magnificently added that the school was damn lucky to have two halves like Steevens and Cole, who suited one another so perfectly and had four seasons yet, in all probability, at Crale. Everybody was saying how lucky it was.

Everybody was saying that ? So he had arrived ? He was safely ensconced inside the First Fifteen. He had achieved the great ambition of his life. Nothing now, unless he went right off his form or fell sick, could rob him of that honour. And yet—and yet—— Here was his ambition fulfilled and here he was regretting something. Regretting what ? He did not know.

And here he was rumbling along and running right into someone. This someone, moreover, was Parlow.

" Sorry, sir ! "

" Hullo ! Who's that ? Is that you, Cole ? "

" Yes, sir."

Parlow put a hand on his shoulder.

" Come in a moment. Got five minutes ? "

" Yes, sir. Thank you, sir."

Parlow's house was just round the corner. They

went in. Jeremy stood for a moment in the hall blinded by the light, then he followed his large broad-shouldered host upstairs.

He had not been here since the unfortunate day of his meeting with Staire. A great many things had happened since then. Yes, and he wasn't going to be easy with Parlow. Parlow needn't think that he'd altogether forgotten. . . .

Parlow didn't think anything of the kind. He began at once about it.

" Look here, Cole, I've got to make my apologies I've been wanting to for some time. I had no right to say what I did, and especially in class. It's not the first time my temper's betrayed me into an injustice and I'm sorry. If you can forgive me for it I'll be glad."

Very embarrassing. Jeremy wished people wouldn't do these things and yet in this case something had to be said before everything could get on again smoothly.

He lifted his head and looked Parlow in the face.

" It wasn't true what you said, sir. I felt it was unjust. A lot of fellows were down on me just then, and I didn't see what I'd done wrong." Then he smiled and his whole face wrinkled and lighted. " But it's all right now, sir. Everything's all right."

" I'm forgiven, then," said Parlow easily. (There was something serious beneath their talk and they both of them realized this.) " I won't do it again, I can promise you. I want you to come in here a lot next term—just whenever you feel inclined. Lots of fellows don't care for books and pictures a bit but I think you will—or at least you ought to.

"Oh, there's Keats!" Jeremy cried excitedly.

"Why, what do you know about Keats?" Parlow asked.

"Oh, only Corner the other day—that's a chap in our House, shares a Study with Llewellyn—asked me whether I knew Keats and I couldn't think what he was talking about."

He picked up the small blue book.

"Oh, it's poetry," he said.

"Yes," said Parlow. "He was an apothecary and he died of consumption before he was thirty. He wrote some of the grandest things in English literature. I'll lend you his Letters for a start —the early volume of them, anyway, and then you can read some Hazlitt and then some of Lamb's Letters. They were all friends—a wonderful time when great men of letters were as common as gooseberries."

"And aren't they now?" said Jeremy, for something to say.

"No, they're not," said Parlow.

So they were friends again. Jeremy departed up the dark path to the school. Yes, they were friends. But Parlow wasn't quite as he had been. He would never be again quite what he had been before that bit of trouble. . . .

2

It was not until he was summoned up to the box-room by Ma Bender that the full tide of his happiness swung in upon him. It was then, when he entered the long stuffy room and saw the rows

and rows of trunks and boxes, many corded and piled against the wall, others lying open and exposed, pressed down and running over with shirts and collars and pants, and in the middle of them Ma Bender and the two maids, sweating with their hard work under the hissing gas—yes, then he was suddenly swung into a bliss of happiness, a kind of mist of trains going home and holly with light, red, glistening berries, masses of things to eat and freedom!

Ma Bender was stout, her stays crackling and creaking with exertion and her body, bent forward over the boxes, so broad that it didn't seem to resemble a body at all. She raised a red perspiring face.

"Oh yes, you Cole. Just look in your box there and see whether those shirts are yours. There are four of them unmarked."

He looked at his box and remembered how terribly proud of it he had been three years ago when, new and gleaming, it had first been his. Now it was old and battered but *part* of him, having in its dents and shabby label some of his personality.

They were not his shirts. He turned round to say so. Two boys came bustling in. One of them was the Dormouse. A Dormouse transformed, noisy, untidy, perspiring with energy and excitement, prepared to shout. Then he saw Jeremy and stopped.

"Now, you boys," said Ma Bender; "coming in here making all that row. You aren't home yet, you know, plaguing your poor mothers. Whatever they do with you, the holidays being so

long, *I* can't think. All the same, I'm glad you give us a breathing space I'm sure. What I mean to say is, we'd never get along if we hadn't one, tiring us out as you do. . . . Now, Morgan, you just leave those boxes alone. You mind your own business. The most troublous boy in the whole House, that's what you've become. What I mean to say is, you were quiet enough when you come here first, but as I always do say, it's those that are quietest when they come first who are the most trouble afterwards. What I mean to say is, you never *can* tell. Now, Morgan, you come away from those boxes and you too, Pritchett Minor."

The Dormouse looked at Jeremy smiling. He seemed to have lost his old shyness.

"I say, isn't it ripping going home to-morrow!"

Jeremy smiled back.

The Dormouse went on:

"Would you like an apple? I've got two."

"Thanks awfully," said Jeremy.

"Now, you boys . . ." began again Ma Bender.

Jeremy departed, nodding to the Dormouse. A decent kid and perhaps one day he'd play football.

On his way to his Study he met Llewellyn. Llewellyn leaned back against the passage wall and drew Jeremy close to him, putting his arm around his shoulder.

"There's something I want to ask you," he said. "Look here, will you come in a lot to our Study next term?"

Jeremy hesitated.

"What?" he said at last.

"Come in often to our Study. Corner doesn't mind. There's plenty of room."

A pleasant idea. He would escape some of Gauntlet's company. Llewellyn's Study was twice as big as his own. Corner would be able to tell him lots of things he wanted to know. . . . He *liked* Llewellyn.

But the pressure of Llewellyn's hand on his shoulder irritated him. He had noticed, already, that Llewellyn was inclined to be "soppy" and Corner wouldn't like it. Not if he came in too much. . . . He moved a little away.

"That's frightfully decent of you, Llewellyn," he said. "Only——" he paused awkwardly. "I think I won't just yet, if you don't mind. Chaps will think I am putting on side going about much with you and Corner."

"What does it matter what chaps say?" asked Llewellyn.

"No, I know, but you see I've had a bit of a row this term, as it is. All that dust up with Staire, and I'm sick of it."

"I don't see that that's any reason," said Llewellyn, rather sulkily.

"And then there's Corner," Jeremy went on. "It's awfully decent of him. He may think he doesn't mind but he *would* mind afterwards. He's leaving after the summer term, isn't he?"

"Yes, but so am I," said Llewellyn.

"I think I won't come much at present, if you don't mind," said Jeremy amiably. Llewellyn was inclined to be sulky.

"All right," he said, moving. "Have it your own way."

But he was too truly good-natured and good-hearted to keep it up. "Will you write to me in the hols. if I do to you?" he asked.

"Of course," said Jeremy laughing.

"I'd like you to come and stay with my people," Llewellyn said.

"All right! Thanks!" But Jeremy knew that he wouldn't go. Llewellyn seemed to want to say something more. But he didn't. He moved, lumbering, away.

3

They had had to wait until the House bell rang, then they poured into the dining hall and the whole glorious scene burst upon them.

The long room was hung with coloured festoons and the tables covered with crackers and starred with bowls of chrysanthemums. More satisfying than the chrysanthemums were the dishes of trifle, the great piles of fruit—oranges and apples and bananas—and the almonds and raisins.

Leeson was already standing at the head of the top table when the boys poured in, and, one on either side of him, were the two guests of honour, a long, thin man with a humorous mouth and a stout, red-faced man with chubby cheeks and a rather self-satisfied manner. One of these men Jeremy knew well and was delighted to see there. He came down every Christmas. His name was Pothshorn. He was an artist in London who drew pictures for books. The only

artist beside Uncle Samuel Jeremy had ever seen. But the point about him was not that he was an artist but that he was a gloriously funny fellow, and he would stand up later on, when the "feed" was over, and tell marvellous stories and recite most amusing poems—all the time with that serious, long face and odd protesting mouth. He was, in fact, Leeson's special pride. Everyone from the oldest boy to the smallest loved him and it was no proper House Supper if he were not present.

The other guest, so Jeremy was informed, was a man who wrote stories and made money by writing them. He looked as though he made a lot of money and as though he liked himself for doing it. He looked, Jeremy thought, as though he wanted everybody to be fond of him, but it would be easier on the whole to be fond of old Pothshorn. The stout writing man had been at Crale years ago. He beamed on everybody as though they ought all to be jolly glad that at last he had come back. . . . Small boys are very sharp; they all felt this and determined not to show him any feeling at all.

However, after Leeson had said the Grace and they all sat down, the honoured guests didn't matter in the least—they were completely forgotten.

Jeremy was as happy as it is possible for a mortal to be.

"'Am, Tongue or Chicken?" said 'Appy Alfred, breathing hard behind his ear. ('Appy Alfred was the Leeson Boots, general factotum, male "Marchioness" of the pantry.)

"Tongue *and* Chicken," said Jeremy hopefully.

Jumbo was sitting next to him, Llewellyn gesticulating to him from higher up the table, lots of people beaming or flicking bread pellets or calling out. . . . He was popular to-night, and after all the troubles of the term he liked to feel that he was.

Staire was almost opposite to him, looking smarter in a magnificently shining Eton collar than anyone else in the place. Jeremy had lost all his troubled feeling about Staire. Staire didn't trouble him any longer. But he didn't *like* Staire. And he never would. He saw with pleasure that they'd given him a wing instead of a leg. No, he'd never like Staire, but the storm between them was over because they respected one another now. That's what a fight did. It made you respect the other man.

He had, however, but little time for these mysterious speculations. The most wonderful orangeade was going round in huge glass tumblers, and after the chicken there were pâtés, and after the pâtés more chicken, and after the chicken more tongue, and after the tongue TRIFLE, and after the trifle MORE TRIFLE, and after More Trifle a THIRD HELPING.

Then there were apples, oranges, bananas, almonds and raisins, and NUTS. By this time the noise was very general.

Any stiffness that there had been in any direction was now entirely dissipated, and it was remarkable to witness how Ma Bender (no relation, by the way, of the footballer who, although he was in another House, had suffered a good deal from this strange coincidence of names) bridled and giggled and bridled again with the stout novelist who

obviously felt it his duty to be amiable with everyone, so that everyone might say how amiable he was; and how Mrs. Leeson, who was known scholastically as the Crocodile, because of her scaly exterior, threw off her armour and dallied like a naiad with prefects like old Llewellyn, who happened to be sitting near to her.

Now, if there was one thing that Jeremy loved it was for everyone to be happy, and happy to-night certainly everyone was. He could feel the happiness surging all around him. He felt as though everyone wanted to burst out singing and very soon everyone would. . . .

But first, Leeson had to make his speech. He got up, banged on the table for silence, then told them all about the Term. The things that he had to tell them would not, in ordinary times, have seemed very interesting, but to-night, elated with orangeade and trifle, damp with heat and excitement, every sort of gay colour floating before your eyes, an extraordinary sentiment of "House" rose in your heart.

Dear old House! What wouldn't you do for it! Dear old House with all its tradition and friendship and future history . . . which *you* were going to help to make in the future mark you. That was what Paddy was at this very moment saying.

"There's not a boy among you, however young, who hasn't his part to play in making this House something that England may be proud of. . . ."

Oh yes, he said all this word for word every year, and once the House Supper was over it seemed

Poppycock to you and Soppy. But to-night there was more in it for Jeremy than usual. As he sat cracking nuts, a red-paper cap set rakishly over one ear, he felt that he would do a lot for the House in the future—oh yes, he would. Someone was kicking him under the table and he kicked vigorously back.

But now Paddy had come to the bit about the Match.

"We were fortunate to have more boys in the Callendar Match this term than any other House!"

Then you could have heard the cheering! Didn't everybody yell? And then suddenly everyone rose and sang, "For they are Jolly Good Fellows" and the five men who had played in the Match were forced to sit there and look foolish. Jeremy had attempted to rise but was energetically held down. "Good old Stocky!" someone near him cried, and people punched him and grinned at him and threw nut-shells at him, and even Staire condescended to smile and say something or other. Oh yes! a fine affair and Jeremy enjoyed it.

When this had subsided Leeson passed on to the honoured guest who wrote stories in London. He had not, it seemed, been at Crale for very long but they were all glad to welcome him back again (to judge from his figure and grey hair he had been away for a considerable time).

Then the honoured writer of stories rose and made everyone uncomfortable by his allusions to "the dear old school," and "how proud we shall all be," and "every stone of the dear old buildings had its history," and "after all she was our mother,"

and "what it meant to him to be here again," and "he was the friend of each one of them."

Everyone was terribly glad when he sat down again, smiling upon everyone in the room as though he had begotten the lot of them. "He's jolly pleased with himself," Jumbo whispered to Jeremy.

"You bet he is," Jeremy whispered back.

But Pothshorn, then rising, made everything right again. He had a little stutter which was charming and he didn't even mention his feelings. On the contrary he began at once to tell a little story about an old woman who had two cows, one called Lucy and one called Isabel, and how Isabel . . . but never mind, it wasn't the story so much as the way he told it. "Well, that's a n-new story," he said when he finished. "Which old o-one would you like?"

That's what everyone loved—to be asked to choose. Therefore everyone shouted "The one about the railway station!" "The Painter and his Box of Paints!" "Lost in London!". . . They knew them all, as why shouldn't they when he had told them to them over and over again?

Then, best of all, his face solemn and even mournful, his long thin body still and funereal, he recited "The Walrus and the Carpenter"—a marvellous performance, and then, at the last, gave them "His Adventures in the Country"—how he stayed in a cottage and of the things that came out of the thatch and the old woman who lost his clothes and the savage dog who kept him in bed in terror until mid-day. Ah! but this was wonderful! Jeremy sat there absorbed, lost, his eyes bursting

out of his head, his mouth wide open. Jumbo whispered something and without taking his eyes away from Mr. Pothshorn he whispered back, "Oh shut up!" How marvellous to be able to do this, to imitate the old woman, and the cow, and the cat, and the parrot screaming "I saw you, you dirty dog!" and the postman with the letters and no roof to his mouth. . . . So long as it lasted he was transported there, abandoned, out of his own body. When it was over Jeremy sat back with a sigh. Oh! if he could only do that! Perhaps he could. He would try, when he was at home. Maybe the stage was after all his true career.

As Pothshorn gathered together his long body and sat down Jeremy, staring at him, envied him more than anyone else in the world.

4

Now was the time when people could go out if they wished to. Jeremy was one of those who so desired, partly because he wanted some fresh air and partly because he was not sure whether he were not going to be sick.

He slipped quietly away, down the passage, out into Coulter's.

The fresh air at once restored him. And what a night! The sky was simply plastered with stars, as though you'd stuck them on with a shovel. It was deliciously quiet and cool. In the distance singing could be heard. All the Houses to-night were having their Suppers. Soon they would be singing at their own Supper and how Jeremy

loved that! Lifting his voice to its full—"John Peel," and "Forty Years On," and "Hearts of Oak," and "Sally in our Alley," and "It's my delight," and "Crale for ever, Free and Strong."

But before he went back he would stand there a moment and sniff the clean air and feel the stars. That other part of him that was unusual, shy, reticent, full of emotion that mustn't be expressed. was drawn out of him by the beauty and splendour of the night.

He didn't often think of himself, but just at this moment he considered the term, the most dramatic and eventful that he had ever known at Crale. Yes, in spite of some things it had been a good term, but why had it been odd and strange and bewildering?

With a flash of comprehension he realized. His childhood was over. He wasn't to be a kid any longer. He was on the way to manhood. Other people realized it. He realized it himself.

He knew it in his relation to games, work, the school; and he saw it in the relation of Leeson, Llewellyn, Jumbo to himself. There was something odd there, something that had shut him up inside himself so that, with the exception of Uncle Samuel, he seemed to be able to give his real feelings to no one. Only there was Ridley to whom he had never spoken. That would give him what he wanted. He could tell Ridley things. . . .

And then the amazing, blinding coincidence occurred, something that made him in after years, when people said that coincidences in books were

ridiculous, answer "I don't know. . . . They *do* happen. . . ."

He turned to go in because it was cold and ran straight into someone who came round the corner.

"Hullo! Look out!" said the someone, catching him by the arm.

It was Ridley!

He stood, holding his arm, trying to see who it was.

"Sorry," said Jeremy. "I didn't see you."

"That's all right," said Ridley.

"I say——" Jeremy began. His heart was beating wildly. He was oddly afraid.

"Yes?" said Ridley, visible now from the lamp at Leeson's corner.

"I'm Cole. . . . I—I just came out for a moment. It was hot in there."

"Yes?" said Ridley again. Then, very pleasantly: "You're the football Cole, aren't you? I've seen you in Chapel."

"I've seen you, too," said Jeremy. "Lots of times. I've wanted to speak to you—often."

"Have you?" said Ridley. "Why?"

"I don't know," said Jeremy. "I'd awfully like to talk to you sometimes, though."

Ridley laughed. "Well, you can if you want to," he said.

"Next term," Jeremy went on. "Would you think it awful cheek if—would you mind if—could we go for a walk one Sunday?"

"Of course," said Ridley, laughing again. "You'll find me awfully dull."

"Oh no I won't," said Jeremy fervently.

"Right. It's your risk. Any time you like."

"Thanks most frightfully," said Jeremy.

There was a pause.

"Good night," Ridley said.

"Good night," Jeremy answered.

Then, happier than he had ever been in all his life before, he went into Leeson's.

Printed at The Chapel River Press, Kingston, Surrey.
F100.727